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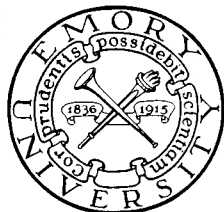
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THE
LADDER OF GOLD.

An English Story.

BY ROBERT BELL,
AUTHOR OF "WAYSIDE PICTURES THROUGH FRANCE, BELGIUM,
AND HOLLAND," ETC. ETC.

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TO HIS EXCELLENCY

M. SYLVAIN VAN DE WEYER,

ENVOY EXTRAORDINARY AND MINISTER PLENIPOTENTIARY

FROM THE

King of the Belgians to the Court of St. James,

&c. &c. &c.

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF A COUNTRY
WHOSE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROGRESS HAS BEEN MAINLY ADVANCED
BY THE JUDGMENT, TEMPERANCE, AND ABILITY
WITH WHICH HE HAS PROMOTED ITS INTERESTS ABROAD
AND GUIDED ITS COUNCILS AT HOME;
AND WHOSE LITERATURE HE HAS ENRICHED BY CONTRIBUTIONS
EQUALLY REMARKABLE FOR
THEIR PHILOSOPHICAL ACUMEN AND THE BRILLIANCY OF THEIR WIT:—
A DIPLOMATIST WHOSE URBANITY, FIRMNESS, AND DISCRETION,
DURING A LONG RESIDENCE AMONGST US,
HAVE WON THE RESPECT AND ATTACHMENT OF THE PEOPLE
AND OF THE GOVERNMENT, FROM WHOM
HE RECEIVED A DISTINGUISHED PROOF OF THE NATIONAL CONFIDENCE,
BY BEING SELECTED AS ARBITRATOR OF THE BRITISH CLAIMS
BETWEEN ENGLAND AND PORTUGAL:—
CLOSELY CONNECTED WITH THIS COUNTRY BY ALLIANCE,
BY INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE WITH OUR LITERATURE,
AND BY ASSOCIATION AND SYMPATHY WITH OUR MEN OF LETTERS:—
AN ACCOMPLISHED SCHOLAR
AND AN ENLIGHTENED POLITICIAN,

THIS ENGLISH STORY

Is Inscribed,

AS A SLIGHT TRIBUTE TO THOSE QUALITIES OF MIND AND HEART
WHICH DIGNIFY AND EMBELLISH HIS LIFE
THROUGHOUT ITS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RELATIONS.

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THE LADDER OF GOLD.

BOOK THE FIRST.

THERE IS A SKELETON IN EVERY MAN'S HOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PEABODY FAMILY.

IT was mid-winter; and a heavy fall of snow, depositing itself in all manner of odd nooks and crannies, and leaving sundry parts of the architecture standing up bare and black, was rapidly converting the housetops of a little town on the eastern coast into a chaos of unintelligible shapes and shadows. If the moon could have penetrated the haze which intercepted that heap of human habitations, she must have been considerably perplexed to pick out from the confused mass the outlines of the quaint eaves and fantastic gables of Yarlton.

Down in the narrow, zigzag streets, the snow was playing the same pantomimic tricks upon window-sills and shop projections, and up entries, and gateways, and blind alleys. Wherever there was a corner that took the wind's eye, it was blockaded by the besieging drift, which swirled upwards in fierce eddies to the chimney-pots, round which it danced and leaped like mad. Old porches, here and there, looked like sheeted sentry-boxes pitched against the dark background of the houses. Crazy wooden lamp-posts were crowned with queer white caps, tied under the chin of the dim light in ragged knots. Grotesque forms, resembling fragments of cats and baboons, were squatted on the swinging sign-boards; and the Golden Canisters, and Red Boots, and Original Hats, which advertised the marine public of Yarlton where the best articles in their respective lines were to be obtained, had put on a wild sort of masquerade, like gorgons and griffins glaring upon you through a mirage.

There were that night in many great mansions blazing fires and loud revelry, all in-door comforts being wonderfully en-

hanced by a sense of triumph over the storm which rages outside, but cannot find entrance; and there were also on the bleak highways, and in the ruts on the skirts of villages, many torpid and famished wretches creeping for shelter under walls and hedges, and trying to sustain the life heat till a new day should open upon their wretchedness. But the struggle of an intermediate class to keep out the wolf that howls on the threshold, is a hundred times more wearing and wasting than downright pauperism, which has no appearances to keep up, and goes straight to its refuge in the public charities of the world.

Towards the extremity of the main street of Yarlton branched off a small row of houses, inhabited for the most part by the wives of sea-captains and mates of vessels, who, in the tedious intervals of grass-widowhood, while their husbands were absent on long voyages in the China seas, and other remote quarters of the globe, solaced their loneliness by letting lodgings, principally to single gentlemen. From the number of little bills on the shutters, and an occasional display of hard-bake and dusty apples, piled up pyramidically in the windows, it might be surmised that the dwellers in Trafalgar-row did not consider the humblest speculations beneath their attention. Yet, notwithstanding these signs of unobtrusive indigence, the place had a retired and genteel appearance, which might, perhaps, be ascribed to a board at the entrance exhibiting the words, "No Thoroughfare," the opposite extremity being boarded up with a notification, addressed in vain to the enterprise of the Yarltonians, that the mysterious space within was to be let for building. This circumstance, although it kept out the public traffic, was nevertheless attended by some inconvenience to the inhabitants, as the aforesaid boarding was the favourite resort of the little boys of the neighbourhood, who used to take an inscrutable delight in peeping through the chinks at the heaps and hollows of earth and bricks beyond, where some projector had dabbled in the building-lots, and, for want of capital, left his foundations unfinished. With this exception, however, the only invasions to which Trafalgar-row was exposed were from wandering organ-grinders, puppet-shows, and dancing-monkeys—a class of entertainments largely patronised by the seaboard population.

In a little parlour in one of these houses, on the night when the snow had the streets all to itself, and nobody was out of doors that could help it, sat two persons at a table; a man about thirty years of age, but looking much younger, by virtue

of a round, fresh-coloured face, beaming with a soft and passive expression, and a woman, his junior by three or four years, but whose pale, lank features and fretful eyes gave her the appearance of being at least ten years older than her companion. This deceptive aspect of youth or age is often a matter of temperament. Some people, Heaven help us! are born old.

The considerate Muse of this true history drops a veil over the scanty supper, which lay untouched on the table between them. Nor will she make an inventory of the furniture, although it might be done with a few scratches of her pen, except that she thinks it necessary to record that there was a cradle in one corner, with an infant in it; and on the opposite side a dual-functioned piece of carpentry, which served alternately as a settle and a bed, supplying us at once with the etymology of that ancient article called a settle-bed. There was an open cupboard, disclosing imperfect and rather disorderly lines of cups and saucers, and other bits of ware glimmering behind them; and the walls were adorned with half-a-dozen prints of sky-blue sailors, brandishing huge cutlasses with reckless courage in the air; a fancy sketch of "Sally in our alley," dressed in a chip-hat with streamers, a long puce-coloured sash, short petticoats, like a ballet-girl, and a bunch of flowers in her hand; a ship in full sail upon an ocean of mellow-green billows; and a portrait of Mr. Incedon, in the act of singing "The Storm," painted up to the eyes with a round blot of scarlet, that slightly infringed upon the collar of his jacket. In spite of these gay works of art, the room had a penurious and dismal aspect. There was not much fire in the grate, but luckily the grate was small, and favoured the diligence with which the kindly-featured man from time to time re-packed the embers to keep them together.

"It's gone ten, John," observed the woman, with a furtive glance at the table.

"Only a few minutes," replied her companion; "wait a little longer."

"Perhaps Raggles is worse to-night," she rejoined.

"Wait a bit, and we shall hear, Nan. Lord bless us, how the wind does tear at that scrap of paper, though the shutters be fastened up outside."

"Ah! just like you. All the Peabodys are the same. As long as you can keep out the cold, and get a scramble of something to eat and drink, you'll never trouble your head about doing anything for the family."

"What would you have me do, my dear?" demanded John, taking a little courage, and looking at his wife through the flame of the candle, which he was not sorry stood directly between them.

"Do, my dear? What every man does that has a wife and child," replied Mrs. Peabody. "You know we haven't had a lodger for upwards of six weeks, except cousin Richard; and how do you think we can maintain ourselves and pay our rent out of his four shillings a-week, and the trifle you pick up at the wharf? Now, if anything should happen to Raggles, Richard will be thrown out of employ, and we'll lose that, and have to keep him most likely till he gets another berth."

"Sufficient for the day, Nan," returned Mr. Peabody, who was going on with that exemplary axiom, when he was cut short by the lady.

"Sufficient for the fiddlestick," she broke in; "I'd like to see the day when we're to have sufficient. You're an idle man, Peabody; and I'm always telling you that you're a fool, but it's no use. You get down talking to people of a morning, instead of trying to earn something. But it's no use; I might as well talk to a stone wall."

"Well—well," replied Peabody, in a soft and deprecatory tone, "who knows but we'll have a bit of luck by-and-by."

"Luck?" replied Mrs. Peabody, her thin face becoming apparently more thin and pinched than before; "waiting for a bit of luck! A bit of luck, Peabody? What do you mean by a bit of luck?" And this latter interrogatory was uttered in a sort of scream which bore a painful resemblance to a laugh. Mr. Peabody was constantly expecting a bit of luck, although he never could be induced to explain what shape he expected it was to take, or whether he was to find it in the street, or it was to fall down from the skies; while Mrs. Peabody, having been perpetually frustrated in her attempts to discover it, had arrived at a conviction that it was altogether a mental delusion. When, therefore, she put this direct question to him, which she had put, probably, a hundred times before, Mr. Peabody thought that no great good could be effected by going over the old ground, so he turned slowly to the fire, and in a thoughtful manner began to pack up the embers into the form of a cone.

The scorn of Mrs. Peabody was fortunately prevented from finding vent in words by the arrival of cousin Richard, who, after shaking off a shower of flakes from his coat, and deposit-

ing on a chair a brown paper parcel, which he had carried under his arm, took his seat at the table, with a careless nod to Mrs. Peabody.

Richard was a young man of the middle height, with a fine head and a decidedly handsome cast of features—so handsome as to set you speculating at once upon the figure he would have made had he been born a gentleman, nurtured luxuriously, and put out into the world with advantages of fortune and station. One sometimes meets such a face amongst the children of the poor, and wonders how it came there, and how it happens that poverty does not drag down and degrade its intellectual beauty; as if Nature had no refinements of her own independently of the accidents of birth and breeding. Richard Rawlings might have been mistaken for an aristocrat had he been properly disguised; but something more than the masquerade of costume would have been necessary to enable him to sustain the character. There was an expression of premature toil and suffering in his face that too plainly betrayed the struggling class to which he belonged.

“What have you brought home in the parcel, Richard?” inquired John Peabody.

“Work—work,” replied Richard.

“Raggles is worse to-night,” observed Mrs. Peabody, in a half question.

“As bad as he can be,” said Richard.

“It will be a sad job for you if anything happens to him,” she continued.

“I suppose I must look out elsewhere,” returned Richard.

“Never despair, man,” said John Peabody, who was just going to add something about the possibility of a bit of luck, when the uttering of that consoling observation was checked by a sinister glance from his wife.

“But Mrs. Raggles will keep on the business,” said Mrs. Peabody.

“Not likely,” said Richard: “what does she know about it? He did it all himself. Mrs. Raggles! She does nothing from morning till night but talk to her cat. Another bit of herring, Nan.”

“Hand down that bottle behind you, John,” said Mrs. Peabody. “There’s just a drop left for Richard. She’s a vain poor body, for all I hear of her. But it will be a great pull down to her pride if he should go off. They say she has some rich relations.”

"They *say* so," returned Richard, with a cynical leer, which seemed to imply that he doubted the fact.

"Did you ever see any of them?" inquired John.

"Never," said Richard; "and the only one I ever heard spoken of was an uncle, who went into the coal trade, and settled in France. They have no relations, either of them, and live like hens in a coop."

"But isn't she mighty tawdry and fond of finery?" said Mrs. Peabody.

"When she can get it," replied Richard; "but Raggles is too close to indulge her."

"Well, never despair, I say," remarked John; "who knows but——"

"Now, then, for it, John," interrupted Mrs. Peabody; "now for the bit of luck."

"You're wrong, my dear," responded John; "I assure you, on my word, no—I never thought of such a thing; I was only going to say, that should Raggles die, she might keep Richard to manage the business."

Richard smiled, not very pleasantly, at this observation.

"Now, Dick," said John Peabody, who, in a fine spirit of hopefulness, was always for reconciling everybody and everything, "isn't that rather a little prejudice? You know well enough that she can't do without you. Why, it stands to reason, after seven years."

"Ay, seven years next January," returned Richard; "seven years. And I believe I've been pretty hard at it all that time?"

"That you have," observed Mrs. Peabody; "and the least old Raggles ought to do, would be to leave you something in his will."

"Old Raggles make a will!" observed Richard, smiling more unpleasantly than before; "he'd as soon set fire to his house. He would think that he was giving away all he had in the world. Seven years!" he continued, musingly; and taking up a thin, wavy poker that stood beside the grate, he thrust its attenuated point into the coals, and at a single dash swept down the conical fabric which had been built up so carefully by John Peabody.

"At the end of seven years," resumed Richard, after a short silence, "a man ought to have saved something to set him up in the world. But unless I was a conjurer I couldn't have saved in Raggles' service. He's so jealous of the busi-

ness, that a man might be with him all his life without learning enough of it to begin on his own account. He doesn't give one a chance. He suspects everybody—trusts nobody—the best of all ways to turn an honest man into a rogue!" Here he stopped for a moment, and gulped down a mouthful of the mixture of shrub and water Mrs. Peabody had prepared for him, and then went on: "He keeps his own books, and would never let anybody see them. It's astonishing, isn't it?"

"Very," said Mrs. Peabody, not exactly clear about the matter, although she thought that it must be astonishing.

"Never," said Richard, the unpleasant smile expanding into a sudden laugh—"never saw a line of his books; never allowed to talk to the customers, lest I'd run away with them, I suppose, and set up for myself. Think of that, John Peabody, think of that."

"Well, I do think of it," said John; "and all things considered, isn't it likely now, Dick, that that's only his way. He's an old-fashioned sort of a man, you know, and has been used to his own way; and you must take people as you find them."

"That's uncommon wise of you," observed Mrs. Peabody; "see what you've got by taking people as you find them. Bless the goose, he has been taking people as he finds them all his life, and I'd like to know how he finds *himself* after it. I believe there's two shillings in the house. I needn't say any more on that subject, I suppose, John Peabody?"

"Well, but, my dear," John ventured to remark, "you can't change the nature of people. Here's old Raggles has a particular habit, my dear—a particular habit; we all have our particular habits; and I was only saying to Dick, that in that case it was a pity to take it to himself, that's all;" and he ended with a formidable wink aside to his wife, by way of conveying to her privately his benevolent desire to smooth over the uncomfortable feeling Richard had about Raggles. But Mrs. Peabody was not at all disposed to take this conciliatory view of the matter; and did not hesitate to express her disdain for her husband's temporising policy.

"Don't wink at me, Peabody!" she exclaimed; "I'll not encourage you in your mean-spirited ideas. Particular habits, indeed! Do you want to make Richard as big a fool as you are yourself? Lord, that poor man never could bring himself to suspect anybody of anything. Nothing makes no impression on him, I do believe. He's the right sort of man to go through the world, and bring up a family,"

"Very well, Mrs. Peabody, very well," quietly returned John; "only I don't see the good of suspecting people; but I dare say you're right, my dear."

Mrs. Peabody had some strong opinions on the subject of fools, and maintained that it was better for a woman to be married to the worst of knaves than the most accommodat- ing of fools. And of all fools she considered her husband the greatest, as she told him ten times a-day; and it must be owned that he justified the appellation in some measure by never taking any pains to convince her that he was a man of sense. It by no means follows, however, that he was a fool. The wisest man might have borne the epithet in like circum- stances with a like submission, rather than raise a dispute which could end only by making both parties more obstinate than when they set out.

The conversation now turned off on Mrs. Raggles, and it was clear from what Richard said about her that there was no great good-will between them, and that he had as poor an opinion of her as Mrs. Peabody had of John. If similitudes of character produce the happiest marriages, Mrs. Raggles ought to have been married to John Peabody, for it appeared that she was much the same sort of easy-going, good-for- nothing person, and Mrs. Peabody was malicious enough to observe that it was a pity they were not man and wife, as they would be sure to do well together.

How she and Raggles had gone on together suggested another topic, which naturally led to the consideration of how she would get on by herself if Raggles were to die, an event Richard looked upon as inevitable, Pogeey, the apothecary, having given him up, unless he should take a favourable turn in the course of the night.

"And if he should die," inquired Mrs. Peabody, "what do you think you will do, Richard?"

"Oh!" said Richard, "the best I can, to be sure; let's talk no more about it; I've got some work to do before I go to sleep, and I am quite fagged out. Can you give me a morsel of candle?"

"You may take that," returned Mrs. Peabody; "we've light enough by the fire."

Richard took the candle, and, picking up his brown paper parcel, wished them good night. They listened for a moment as his heavy step went up the stairs, till they heard him enter his room, and lock the door after him.

"He's out of sorts to-night," observed Mrs. Peabody.

John Peabody answered with a yawn, stretching himself out in a fearful manner half over the floor. But the connubial conversation did not end here, and for more than a quarter of an hour afterwards any passer-by might have heard the nasal tones of that thin voice issuing from the settle, responded to at broken intervals by a sonorous snore.

CHAPTER II.

RICHARD RAWLINGS.

WHEN Richard Rawlings got into his room and locked his door, a precaution which Mrs. Peabody had never known him to adopt before, he set down the candle and the parcel upon a little round table, and, throwing himself into a seat, fixed his eyes in a hard stare upon the candlestick. For full five minutes he continued to stare in this entranced way, without any variety or intermission, except when his eyes moved up and down the candle, as if he were taking its dimensions; but, although he looked at it with such apparent steadfastness, it never entered into his thoughts. During that five minutes he ran over the whole history of his life.

He went back to his childhood, which called up a picture of a hovel sprawling amongst muddy outworks of sties and duck-ponds, in a clayey hollow on the brink of a stream fringed by alder-trees, with a ragged orchard at the back, choked up by brambles and long grass almost as tall as himself. He recollected a bridge which abutted close to the hovel on the high road above, and a track leading up to it, upon which he had clambered many a time, crowing and clapping his hands to notify to his mother, who fondly watched him from below, that he had achieved the perilous summit.

And then the scene changed, and all was gloom and silence in the hovel. A miserable light, fixed in a sconce on the wall, showed the emaciated face of a sick woman lying on a pallet; and then followed mourning and wailing, and he was sent out of the way while the tender mother, whose voice still vibrated at his heart, was carried to the grave.

Then came another slide of the dark lantern, the straggling street of a far-off village, and a hard-featured man, toiling from morning till night, and taking the boy, now grown up to a premature consciousness of daily necessities, into the fields,

to help him in his work. This morose man is his father, very harsh at most times, but now and then speaking kind words to him that make the tears tremble in his eyes. The holidays of childhood are all over—the toddling up steepes, and hunting of butterflies, and the terrible hazards through ditches and stiles, and swinging gates; and the boy, with his instincts yet yearning towards play and pastime, is compelled to labour like a dreary man for his daily food. And mixed with these memories are glimpses of a school where he pores over books and slates, and somehow learns to read and write, and cast up rows of figures which he never can keep in a straight line, or shape into equal proportions; some being of gigantic height, and some dwarfed and crippled, and which, in spite of all his pains, he cannot prevent from running into and tumbling over each other.

Then ensues the dimmest change of all. The hard man is crushed down by poverty and overwork, and the boy is alone in the bleak churchyard. The world is out there in the sunshine on the roads, and in the meadows, and on the hills; and crowds of human faces pass and re-pass, but not one is turned towards him; and he wanders up and down, begging for food, and ready for any drudgery that can procure it. He hardly knows how he lives from day to day, but he contrives to live through many years which, looking back upon them at this distance of time, seem like a mist of centuries. The terrible images that rise up in that mist!—the appalling fight for life!—he shudders even now while he thinks of them.

And so he works on to manhood, his sympathies for his kind, if any can be healthily nurtured in such circumstances, perpetually beaten down until his whole faculties become concentrated upon the one object of self-preservation. Perhaps the process has hardened his nature, as it has embittered his life; but he has no spare time for moral reflections. He is engrossed by a more urgent matter—the prospect of being again cast upon the world to starve. It is of that he is thinking—of that alone; and it is filled with horrors, rapidly shaped and huddled together out of the experiences of the past.

He recalls every item of his seven years' servitude in the shop of Mr. Raggles; how he was first taken in upon charity, and put to the lowest offices, which he was then glad enough to discharge; how his honesty was suspected in the beginning, and how he was buffeted and ill-used; how Raggles brought home a young wife, who, conceiving an aversion to him, never

let an opportunity slip of poisoning his master's mind against him by trumpety complaints. A thousand incidents that had happened during this period came back upon him, darkly tinged by a sense of wrongs and contumely. He remembered all the petty vexations acutely—they had eaten into his soul: the benefits he had enjoyed were buried under a heap of injuries. And now, in the end, his situation hung upon a thread, and Raggles was, perhaps, on the point of inflicting upon him the greatest wrong of all by dying, and throwing him out of employment.

Slowly emerging from his meditations, he drew his chair over to the table, and taking up the paper parcel, began to untie the cord. A flush passed over his face, and his hand slightly trembled. What were his thoughts at that moment? He was working himself into a belief that Raggles had been his enemy all throughout. Why should Raggles not have trusted him in his business, and suffered him to make a character by which he could live hereafter? But Raggles had kept him down, and thrust him out of sight. He was known only as a poor, baited underling, whom nobody thought of throwing away a word upon. An insight into Raggles' connexions would furnish him with the means of getting employment when he wanted it; and had Raggles acted justly, there would be no occasion now for him to obtain such necessary information by underhand means. It might be useful to him in various ways to learn something about Raggles' affairs; there might be matters he could take up on his own account; or he might gather some hints that would be valuable to other people, which he could turn to profit. There was, besides, an additional reason for possessing himself of the real state of Raggles' concerns—namely, Mrs. Raggles' total ignorance of them. Should Raggles go off suddenly, what could the poor woman do, if there was not somebody at hand to act for her? nor did it escape his friendly regard for her interests that a preliminary knowledge of Raggles' financial resources would enable him to act for her in a manner which would place her under considerable obligations to him. There was a long arrear of small, grinding annoyances to be settled.

Having got rid of his conscientious scruples on these points in half the time it has taken to recapitulate them, he tore open the parcel and drew therefrom the ledgers and bank-book of Mr. Raggles, which that prudent tradesman had been in the habit of keeping in his desk under the protection of a patent

safety lock. But in times of illness, when households become disordered, keys get straying about into wrong hands, and so it happened that these records of the house of Raggles came into Richard's possession that very morning. When the idea first flashed upon his mind of taking home these books and sifting their contents, he felt very giddy and sick : but it need not be related by what insidious degrees, as the day wore on, the morbid feelings which were consuming his heart overcame his honest compunctions. The only thing he could not quite reconcile himself to was the secrecy of the act. Secrecy had an ugly air of guilt about it. But then he balanced all the other arguments so skilfully, *pro* and *con*, that he was able at last to set aside even that. There is never any lack of successful sophistry on such occasions.

It was probably pure accident which attracted his attention in the first instance to the bank-book ; and great was his surprise at the discoveries he made in that instructive volume. The discovery that chiefly excited his curiosity was the unexpected extent of Raggles' transactions ; for scarcely a day passed that an entry did not appear on one side or the other. The quantity of money in perpetual movement through these little red columns fairly dazzled him. He had always thought that Raggles carried on a thriving business, but he had no suspicion that it involved such large sums and such frequent payments ; and the more he reflected upon their magnitude, the more enormous, by force of contrast, seemed the penurious tyranny with which he had been treated. In short, he could not help regarding Raggles' pecuniary successes as a special refinement of cruelty, which aggravated his own misfortunes ; so that when he came to add up the columns and strike the balance, he was in a proper mood to appreciate at its full value the sum of £845 14s., which he found Mr. Raggles had lying idle in the bank.

The next book, a long, narrow volume, bound in white vellum, inscribed in Raggles' own hand " Bills and Securities," was not so intelligible to him as the simpler cash-account he had just explored. Here several lines were obliterated by a dash of the pen, and others were written in a sort of shorthand, interspersed with figures and capital letters, of which he could make neither head nor tail. These obliterations and hieroglyphics only exaggerated the opinion he had formed of the vastness of the dealings in which Raggles was engaged. It was clear that he had other ways of turning money besides

that general shop in the market-place, which he now began to look upon almost as a blind. If his affairs were legitimate and aboveboard, why should he record them in symbolical devices which nobody could interpret but himself? Securities, too? There was a policy of insurance, plain enough, for he could distinctly trace the name of the Universal Fire Assurance Office, a bond marked B B 31, and a sum of £76 crossed out opposite to the Yarlton Loan Fund. What could all this mean? Did Raggles lend out money on interest? He carefully jotted down all these suspicious items upon the sheet of paper which was lying beside him, and which was beginning to look very like the heads of a bill of indictment.

There were two other books, the regular ledgers. Here all the items were perfectly clear, and they distinctly unveiled the course of the shop trade carried on by Mr. Raggles. This was the precise information he had originally looked for; but his researches had developed a wider range of secrets, and upon a re-examination of his elaborate notes, he found that they were even more various and important than they had seemed at first sight.

Richard Rawlings pondered long upon the facts he was thus enabled to collect by dint of profound conjectural criticism. Sometimes, in the midst of his meditations, it would suddenly occur to him that the man whose private affairs he was thus scrutinising was perhaps wrestling, at that very moment, in the last agony for another gasp of life, oblivious of worldly business, all his bills and securities, insurances and loans, dropping into dust and ashes before his failing senses; and there would come an uncomfortable feeling about a death-bed, and a vision of wan hands thrust out from under the clothes, and figures kneeling about with their heads bowed in prayer; but the memory of the slights and wrongs of years dispelled the suggestions of his better nature, and turned them to bitterness.

The proofs were before him of the wealth that man had amassed during those seven years in which he had heaped such oppression upon him who now sat in judgment on their relative positions. Had Raggles been a poor man, or a struggling man, it would have palliated his harshness and meanness. But Raggles was rich, and *he* was a beggar. Richard Rawlings had a case to make out for his own justification; and in proportion as he succeeded in satisfying himself of the inordinate wealth of Raggles, the hardships, and con-

sequent injustice, that he had suffered, rose up more and more palpably before him.

A third person, dispassionately looking on, might not have been able to detect the force of the reasoning by which he converted Raggles' prosperity into a personal wrong done to himself; but the subtilty that enters into resentments built upon minute points and hoarded trifles, is not easily penetrated by ordinary observers, and is scarcely intelligible to people of large and comprehensive views. There are individuals—not a very numerous class, it is to be hoped—who have an extraordinary power, when it serves the occasion, of calling up, out of a lifetime of kindly intercourse, a miraculous collection of small slights and offences, utterly forgotten by everybody else, if they ever had a real existence, and getting up out of them a plausible catalogue of grievances, which they make it appear that they had borne with exemplary patience. In instances of this nature, however, it generally happens that the grievances are never disclosed till some fortunate opportunity arrives when they can be made use of advantageously, the meek virtue upon which they had been inflicted continuing to bear them with a smiling resignation up to the moment when it can turn them to a profitable purpose. It must not be supposed that Richard Rawlings was an individual of this low and pettifogging cast, for his genius embraced a more expanded horizon; but there was thus far a coincidence between him and such persons, that in his ordinary behaviour to Mr. and Mrs. Raggles he never betrayed his sense of the injuries that were seething in his mind, and that the said injuries never boiled over till he believed Raggles' and his own situation to be on the point of dissolution together.

Fine encouragement this for honesty, thought Richard. The employer grows rich upon the hard servitude of your youth, and leaves you in your manhood a beggar! The man of substance dies, and is followed by a train of crape and feathers to the churchyard, and I go out to starve. And people take off their hats and pray as the body of the rich man passes! How comes it that he, who was no better than myself, poorer in heart and spirit, grasping, mean, and cruel, should have that white stone over his grave, with a pious verse upon it, to inform the world that he is sleeping in heaven, while I am prowling on the high road for bread? What was this man's advantage over me? Wealth. It is the ladder by which men ascend to power over their fellow-men. Why

should not I, too, plant my foot upon it, and climb as well as others?

A new light broke upon him. The project of a life had leapt into his brain.

A little skeleton clock on the stair-head outside his door struck two. The morsel of candle supplied to him by Mrs. Peabody would have left him in the dark long before, had he not had the forethought to provide himself with another on his way home. This second candle was descending slowly into the socket, and beginning to make odd smoky gyrations, which curled upwards from the huge unsuffed wick, when Richard thought it was high time to go to bed. At that instant, while the sinking flame was glimmering and shooting out red sparks on the table, there came a loud and violent knocking at the street-door. It scared him out of his reverie. Had there been light enough in the room to show his face, a rush of blood might have been seen mantling up to the roots of his hair, then suddenly retreating and leaving the marble surface as white as paper.

The first thought that occurred to him was that Raggles had called for his books, and that suspicion of having made away with them had, of course, fallen upon him. He had nerve enough to brave the consequences, if that were all; but shame was paramount to terror. There was still that grace of unsullied youth in him, for it was his first delinquency, and he would gladly have foregone all hopes and resentments to have recalled it. But it was too late. What was to be done? How could he secrete these fatal books? The last floating particle of the candle had already melted down, and the room was pitch-dark, except in that lessening spot upon the table, where the pulsing flame, which threatened to go out at each palpitation, revealed glimpses of the evidence against him. He ran to the window, to see who was at the door, forgetting, in his confusion, that his room was at the back of the house, and that the window looked out upon a little yard jammed up against a dead wall. The knocking was repeated, and, hardly daring to breathe, he stood at the table, unknowingly clutching up the ledgers, and waiting for the issue.

"Who's that at the door?" inquired a shrill voice below.

Richard Rawlings listened with intense attention, but could not catch the answer.

"From Mrs. Raggles?" returned the same voice.

The answer was again indistinct, and the knocking was repeated.

"This is a fine time o'night to waken people out of their sleep, isn't it?" resumed the shrill voice. "What do you want?"

There was now a loud shout, as if the person outside was determined to make the response unmistakeably distinct; and Richard fancied that it sounded like his own name. He sprang to the door to assure himself that it was locked.

"What? You want Richard Rawlings? Well, I'm sure you might have stopped till daylight. Wait a bit, and I'll let you in," said Mrs. Peabody, muttering at the same time a variety of oburgations natural to the occasion.

In a few minutes the street-door was opened, and Richard caught fragments of the conversation that ensued in the hall.

"U-uch!" screamed Mrs. Peabody, as a hurricane of sleet drifted in. "Come in—quick!" And the door was instantly shut again with a loud clap. "Well, what's the matter? U-uch! don't come near me. Lord save us! you're like a snowball."

"Y-i-s, m-a-r-m," replied a shivering voice, which articulated its words letter by letter; "I'm so cold—m-a-r-m—titre—titre—if—you—please."

"Don't stand titrerer there," said Mrs. Peabody. "What's your message?"

"If—you—please—m-a-r-m," resumed the creaking voice; and then there was a terrible shudder of the body of the speaker, which seemed to run up the stairs, and freeze the whole house; "if—you—please—m-a-r-m, master's taken in the fit-tis-isses, and mis-sus sent me, if you please, m-a-r-m, for mis-is-ter Rawling-s-isses."

"In the fittisses?" returned Mrs. Peabody; "then, I suppose, it's all over with him."

"I suppose it is, m-a-r-m," replied the voice, in a leisurely tremble, having discharged its business, and thinking it might now take its time to recover itself.

"John Peabody," cried out the good woman; "do you hear? Raggles is taken in the fittisses."

John Peabody responded in an audible snore.

"Ah! just like you," resumed Mrs. Peabody; "all the Peabodys is the same. Sleep, eat, and drink for ever, and the world going to pieces about you. Get up, I tell you—and c-a-a-l-l R-i-i-ch-a-a-r-d!" which last words being projected into his ear with a prolonged bellow, resembling the screech of a steam-engine, stunned him out of his sleep, and he started

up in the bed like a man demented. After rubbing his eyes, and comforting himself with a hearty shake, his meek and acquiescent disposition speedily adapted itself to the exigences of the moment, as it was habituated to do, and he moved gently out of the bed, and softly across the floor, and up the stairs, without uttering a word till he groped his way to Richard's door.

"Richard!" whispered John Peabody at the keyhole, as if he was afraid of disturbing him. "Richard!"

No reply, but a long surging sound of a heavy sleep.

"Richard," repeated John Peabody, accompanying the summons this time with a low tap at the door.

"Call louder, you fool!" exclaimed Mrs. Peabody, "or he'll never hear you."

"Richard!" repeated John Peabody, in a bolder tone, knocking again rather more loudly.

There was a deep yawn within, followed by a gurgle of dreamy words.

"What's the matter!" demanded Richard.

"You're wanted," replied John Peabody, cringing close up to the door, and shuddering from the cold in a manner that made the entire panel shake.

"Who is it?" inquired Richard.

"It's Crikey Snaggs," cried John Peabody.

"Oh! Crikey Snaggs, is it?" said Richard; "just tell him to step up to the door, will you?"

"Step up this way, Crikey," said John, "and mind you don't fall over the bucket;" and John descended timorously, and, making his way as quietly as he could into bed again, covered himself up in the clothes.

"Well, Crikey," cried Richard, in rather an authoritative tone of voice, keeping his hand clenched on the key of the door all the time; "what brings you here at such an hour of the night?"

"If you please, sir," replied Crikey, "master's taken in the fittisses, and missus says you're to come up, if you please, sir."

"Is that all?" demanded Richard.

"As I knows of," returned Crikey.

"Anybody there?" inquired the other.

"Except the widder, if you please, sir, and Joey, I don't think so," replied Crikey Snaggs.

"Then wait a minute till I dress myself, and I'll come with you," said Richard, turning to the table, and, gathering the

books into the brown paper, he tied up the parcel carefully, and thrust it under the bed ; then opening the door, which he carefully locked after him, and desiring Crikey to go before him, Richard Rawlings noiselessly stepped down the stairs into the street. He was in no disposition to talk to Mrs. Peabody, whose muffled voice he could overhear in voluble discourse with her husband, who was probably by this time fast asleep again.

Crikey Snaggs was a little boy of fifteen years of age, but being singularly contracted in size, looked like a stunted child of not more than ten or eleven. His real name was Bob, but everybody called him Crikey, a nickname that had been given to him on account of an awkward curve in his ribs, which threw his head slightly out of the perpendicular. The *so-briguet* of Crikey was supposed to represent the general idea of crooked, and the boy was so used to it, and it came so natural to him at last, that if any one called him Bob he would never think of answering. Little Crikey had a very large head, with bleary eyes, and thin lips. He had been taken from the Foundling Hospital, and had not the most remote suspicion to whom he belonged, and didn't care. His actual amount of intelligence was strictly limited to doing literally what he was told to do, if he understood it. Beyond that, he ate and drank what he could get in Raggles' establishment, where he was housed and fed ; and was remarkable for no other peculiarity but an invincible tendency to sleep, which overtook him whenever he was left to himself for three consecutive minutes.

When they reached the house in the market-place, the door was opened by a woman-servant already alluded to under the name of Joey, a heavy girl, with a great cap on the top of her head, and an extraordinary profusion of dusty hair clumped up under it, a round face shining all over with soap and good-nature, and a pair of jibing, pale-bluish eyes, in which the light seemed to be always glistening and vanishing, and which made her look irresistibly comical through the thick tears that were raining down her cheeks.

At sight of Richard, Joey's grief burst out afresh, and it was with difficulty he could restrain her from having a regular cry in the passage.

"Don't be foolish, woman," said Richard ; "how is he going on ?"

"Very bad," bubbled out Joey, with a most festive expression of countenance.

"Is he sensible?" he inquired.

"He talks miraculous," said Joey; "and such a heap of things comes into his head, that the like of it was never heerd."

"Why did they send for me?" demanded Richard.

"Don't you know?" she returned; "he has been raving about you, and calling for you this hour back, and I shouldn't wonder," she added, in a dismal whisper, "if he had something very pettikler to say to you."

CHAPTER III.

CONTAINING SOME BIOGRAPHICAL PARTICULARS CONCERNING THE RAGGLES,
WHICH THE READER MAY SKIP IF HE PLEASES.

THE fishing-town of Yarlton, situated in the Hundred of Cutsford, lies high up on the coast, not many miles distant from the Border. It was formerly variously designated Yulton, Yarltoft, and Yarlton, finally softening into Yarlton. A fort is said to have once commanded the place from a high cliff on the northern side; but, as the fort has long since disappeared, and the cliff along with it, posterity is at liberty to exercise its own discretion over the tradition. Like many other very old towns contiguous to the sea, there are some queer hollows and mounds still extant in the neighbouring flats, which are indifferently attributed to the Druids, the Romans, the Saxons, the Dutch, and the Normans; and, should the Archæological Society ever be induced to hold an anniversary in Yarlton, they will find their hands full of historical conundrums, upon which their learned researches may be advantageously bestowed.

At the time we are speaking of, Yarlton had fifteen hundred and odd inhabitants, a little dumpy Gothic church, a sedate chapel of ease, several independent places of worship, and a free-school, besides an alms-house, and an assembly-room over the market-house or town-hall. It was what may be called a bustling, but not a lively, place; for, although the streets were generally pretty full of stray sailors, and chapmen, and motley amphibious pedestrians, who were in constant movement up and down, yet the town had a dull, idle aspect notwithstanding. The people seemed to walk about without any precise object; they lolled, and loitered, and whistled, and looked into shop-windows, and hung about the stalls, as if they had nothing on earth to do, and were waiting for something, rather wishing

that it might not arrive. The only real enthusiasm that ever awoke Yarlton out of this deep lethargy was when the fishermen made a great haul, and returned in the crisp sunshine of the dawn with their flotilla sparkling over the waters. Then everybody was up and astir, and there was a universal rush to the beach, and the town poured out its whole fifteen hundred and odd inhabitants to witness the dragging of the nets and the display of the spoils. The sea-serpent caught and brought home alive, and stretched out on the sands, could not have thrown the population into a condition of greater excitement.

The market-place of Yarlton was the focus of all the traffic and all the idleness. Here there were tilted waggons and country-carts, and trucks resembling sledges, and occasional postchaises, and wheelbarrows piled up, according to the season, with geraniums, vegetables, crockery-ware, kettles, saucepans, brushes, rugs, mats, and the like, to be seen in perpetual motion, or spread out over the ground on market-days, after the manner of a bazaar in the open air. Here also were the two great inns of Yarlton, exactly *vis-à-vis*, and keeping a vigilant watch upon each other: the Grundy Arms, which was considered the genteeler, and more modern of the two, being called, moreover, after Squire Grundy, of Grundy Hall, who presided at the inauguration dinner, and having a portico in front that advanced some ten feet into the street, and was covered at the top with a forest of myrtles, firs, and aloes; and the Drake's Head (not the bird, but the Admiral), a very old, lengthy house, with a sloping tiled roof, small casement windows, a tottering wooden porch, which seemed to be held up and kept together by a thick group of monthly roses that wandered out into the air overhead, and wooden benches in front, upon which, at all hours, somebody was sure to be sitting. Here, too, in this broad, miscellaneous market-place, were the best shops, the only shops, statistically speaking, that rendered it worth the while of the Custom House to send up to London a monthly voucher of the exports and imports of Yarlton.

In the good old war time, under the patriotic auspices of Billy Pitt, Yarlton was a prosperous place for its size and opportunities. Amongst the most opulent of its inhabitants was Ebenezer Raggles, a man of patient industry and high moral character. His moral character was his *cheval de bataille*. He started in life with it, and found it so useful to him that no temptations could induce him to risk it. To say that a

man starts in life with a character of any kind may, perhaps, appear paradoxical : but in this case it was perfectly true, for Ebenezer was a member of the highly respected sect called Methodists, and began the world with all the credit in advance which the world is disposed to give to strictly pious people. The Methodists were in high vogue in the commercial line at that time, and Ebenezer, by the severity of his manner and assiduous attention to business, became, in the course of a few years, a prominent person, in a town where prominent persons were looked up to with a feeling of reverence almost amounting to awe.

There was another circumstance very much in his favour. As a matter of religious profession he was opposed to wars ; as a matter of business he was obliged to support them. The Christian protested against the iniquity of bloodshed ; the tradesman was compelled to live by it. So that while, on the one hand, he mourned over the sinfulness of turning men out of the paths of godliness into soldiers and sailors, on the other, he dealt in all kinds of general stores for exportation for the use of the troops abroad, and for the victualling and clothing of the navy. This was felt by the Yarltonians to be a great hardship, and he was looked upon as a man who was making a daily sacrifice on a tender point of conscience, from the purest patriotic motives ; and his popularity increased accordingly.

And thus Ebenezer Raggles carried on a handsome trade as long as the wars lasted, and gradually absorbed whatever windfalls chanced to drop in the way of contracts and general speculations. He became local agent for the Universal Fire Assurance Company, by which, although he did not net much profit, he improved his influence, and, amongst other undertakings, allowed himself to be nominated as a director of the Yarlton Loan Fund, which returned twenty per cent. per annum upon the original capital.

Yet, prosperous as he was, Ebenezer had his private troubles. Wherever there is much sunshine in the crowded haunts of life,—there must be some shadow. Every day has its night, every weal has its woe, is a legacy from the old proverbial philosophy which is found in every house ; there is a sorrow of some sort lying hidden in the happiest places. Ebenezer had his in the person of an only son.

When only sons do not turn out to be the joy of their fathers' lives, they usually turn out to be their plagues. There

is little choice between the opposite poles in that wide region of self-will and impunity which the only son is so often allowed to career over by blind affection and erring forbearance. Ebenezer, who was a shrewd and rigorous man to all the rest of the world, was strangely indulgent to his only son ; and Tom Raggles in due time kicked the traces, and broke clear away from the parental control.

Tom first showed signs of his independence at school. He had grown up in the notion that his father was the richest man in Yarlton, and in accordance with this impression he topped all his schoolfellows in the boldness of his exploits. Of course he had, or pocketed, whatever money he wanted, and, armed with this power, he did what he liked ; and, greatly to his father's scandal, his first outbreak took an heroic direction. He was particularly fond of building fortifications of clay and bricks and oyster-shells in the playground, and blowing them up with trains of gunpowder. The battle mania had seized upon the schools, like a raging epidemic, and Tom Raggles was the generalissimo of the quiet commercial academy where his father had placed him in the vague hope of discipline and double entry. He would draw out the boys in regular battalia, and providing them, at his own expense, with tin guns, excellent for discharges of pebbles and gravel, it was his delight to dispose them in hostile lines, abundantly provided in the centres and at the extremities with heaps of ammunition, and to halloo them into an engagement ; and when, in the fury of their martial ardour, they came to close quarters, it was a strict regulation that each man should throw away his gun, and draw out a wooden sword, with which he was to fall upon the heads of the enemy. In the course of these campaigns, many a boy lost an eye, or had a cheek cut open, or a tooth knocked out, while some were carried away triumphantly on litters to their beds of glory. This sort of thing could not be expected to last very long. The whole neighbourhood complained of it. Occasional stones and showers of pebbles found their way over the walls, and carried the war into the neutral hats, and bonnets, and baskets of the peaceful pedestrians outside ; and the fireworks and explosions created as much dismay as if the French had landed in full force upon the coast. This could not last ; and, after many remonstrances, and many interviews with Mr. Raggles, senior, and many negotiations between the father and son, and many stratagems to induce the young gentleman to

return to the paths of citizenship, all of which were ineffectual, Mr. Hummums, the principal of the commercial academy, felt himself reluctantly obliged, with a load of thanks and apologies, to send Master Raggles home.

The effect of this measure was only to transfer the military activity of Tom Raggles from the play-ground to the shop. Tom was no sooner re-established at home than he commenced operations behind the counter, converted his papa's elevated skeleton desk at the top of the steps into a battery, upon which he planted two pieces of artillery, ingeniously inserted crackers in rolls of cloth and other articles, which were sure to explode the moment they were touched, and filled every convenient little hole in the stools with gunpowder, having a match always ready to fire them when anybody was about to sit down, which he called "taking the enemy by surprise." The infinite variety of his tactics successfully defeated the vigilance of his father, who was taken by surprise, in common with the enemy, every hour in the day; so that there was nothing left for it but to send him back again to school to get him out of the way.

He was now placed under the charge of Mr. Fogleton, a serious man, of inflexible domestic habits, who always dressed in black, and wore excruciatingly tight white neckcloths. But in less than a week Tom had so completely subverted the discipline of the academy, that Mr. Fogleton was compelled to adopt the distressing alternative of relinquishing the thirty-five pounds a-year, with extras, which he was to have received for that young gentleman's tuition. He therefore sent him back to his papa, but in a more formal manner, as might be anticipated from his constitutional gravity, than had been adopted by Hummums. He made Tom, as a measure of wholesome reproof, the bearer of a long letter to his father full of moral reflections on the general tenor of his character and conduct; which letter it is not necessary to trouble the reader with, as Tom tore it up into a great many small fragments, which he distributed along the high road for the edification of the public, before he reached home.

In this way the education of Tom Raggles was conducted for several years. His progress much resembled that of the ingenious piece of mechanism which, by the action of invisible wheels, makes two steps backward for every one it goes forward, so that, in due time, instead of reaching the end of its journey, it is further off from it than when it started.

When Tom had finished his schooling, he was a proficient in all the scampish accomplishments of his day, and had made scarcely any perceptible advance in practical or useful acquisitions, beyond the common rudiments of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Emancipated from the surveillance of the school-room, he made his *début* in public life with unbounded applause. Tom Raggles was a buck of the first water. Despising the sleek costume of the sect to which he nominally belonged, Tom made a brilliant appearance in yellow pantaloons and Hessian boots, a bright blue coat, and an embroidered waistcoat. He rode races, drank, gambled, and, as became a lad of spirit, boasted of his intrigues. The cock-pit and the ring had the honour of including him amongst their most constant frequenters; he bred dogs, and shot without a license; committed gallant trespasses upon preserves and farmyards; and took so keen a delight in all sorts of contraband pleasures and illicit sports, that a considerable portion of his time was consumed in defending himself against charges of assault and battery, buying off witnesses, compromising depredations, and keeping out of the way of warrants.

Ebenezer looked on with passive dismay at the course upon which his son had launched himself. He was getting very old and very feeble, and the power he had suffered to pass out of his hands when Tom was a boy, could never be recalled now that Tom was a mannikin. A curious transposition of their relations towards each other grew insensibly out of these circumstances: Ebenezer dwindled into a child, and Tom became master of the house, and of everything that was in it. Remembering what Ebenezer had been in his stalwart days,—that close, compact, sagacious man of business,—it was as good as a homily to hear Tom checking his drivelling admonitions, and turning his superannuated notions of life inside out. The elasticity of youth carried it hollow against the stale experiences of age. It was wiser, and braver, and more up to the mark; looked with contempt upon the old safeguards and defences, which it sneered at as mere superstitions and prejudices; and proclaimed aloud that the world had made a start, which left all such antiquated doctrines at an immeasurable distance behind. What was it but rank nonsense to talk about the tortoise beating the hare? Thus new generations rise and trample down their predecessors who laid the foundations for them.

and thus it has happened from the beginning, and will happen again and again to the crack of doom.

Ebenezer drivelled on a few years longer, and then dropped into the grave, and Tom had the business all to himself.

A sudden, but not at all an extraordinary, change passed over his character. It was the easiest transition in the world for Tom to rush from one extreme to another. As we find in the natural history of insects, that the grub turns into a butterfly, so it often occurs in the natural history of man, that the butterfly turns into a grub. Whether the love of pleasure had exhausted the kernel of enjoyment, and left nothing to batten upon but the shell; or whether, being in itself purely sensuous, it merely took another shape of selfishness, it is needless to inquire, for we are interested only in the fact that after having squandered his health, and a great deal of his father's money "in a youth of frolics," Tom Raggles settled down into a middle age of thrift and avarice. Having thrown away all the money he could get from his father, he devoted the rest of his life to saving all the money he could make for himself.

Let nobody be shocked at this violent reaction. It takes place every day, although it is not always visible on the surface. Men harden as they get older: the frost of time steals on and nips their sympathies; and when they begin to acquire wealth, they begin to discern the folly of generosity, and the wisdom of cultivating that laudable prudence which displaces the eager liberality of youth. See how friendships politely bow friendships to the door upon the faintest suspicion of being about to be put to the test: how the warmest protestations of the poor man, who knows he cannot fulfil them, cool down into cautious reserve when he becomes rich. Who is there that preserves in his manhood the boyish bloom of his open-hearted teens? It is good and elevating to believe that there are such men—but as it is a rare fortune to meet them, let them be honoured, cherished, and loved in proportion to their scarcity.

Tom Raggles, no doubt, found himself inconveniently pressed upon by the numerous tag-rag and bob-tail of his former associations, who all wanted to borrow money from him, and implicitly believed that his accession to independence would be the making of them; so, without much ceremony, he abruptly shut the door upon his needy and wasteful old friends, turned his face to the desk, and set to work at

his business with the avidity of a miser. The times had undergone a change as well as Tom Raggles. The wars were over; there was no more provisioning, victualling, and contracting; the Assurance Office had taken lodgings for itself in a branch office; the Loan Fund had dropped down fifteen per cent.; and the famous establishment of Ebenezer Raggles had subsided into a general shop, such as are common to small country towns, a kind of Noah's Ark, in which all sorts of things are to be had "from a needle to an anchor."

If old Ebenezer, who had been so grievously twitted by Tom for his antediluvian maxims touching industry and economy, could have seen him in his altered condition, he would have witnessed an eccentric graft upon his own example. Being deficient in the breadth of understanding and the knowledge of mankind, by which his father had achieved his position, Tom conducted his affairs upon the narrowest and meanest principles, saved pence where his father had made shillings, and, for all his diligence and parsimony, never succeeded in conciliating the respect of the townspeople. And such was the moral of the new generation, which had scoffed so superciliously at the old one.

For years and years, Tom Raggles plodded on, leading laborious days, and scorning all delights of festive board and womankind, gathering wrinkles on his face and hands, and living as abstinently as a monk of La Trappe. Out of that unsocial state, however, he was doomed to be disturbed at last, and in a way which, considering how thin his blood had become, and how all sense of the pleasant things of the world had been dried up in him, may be described as something truly surprising.

When this great crisis in his life arrived, Tom was at least on the shady side of fifty-five. He was a small thread of a man, with the aspect of one who had been baked in an oven and overdone. There were two very strong presumptive arguments against the likelihood that Tom Raggles would ever marry: firstly, the difficulty of obtaining his own consent; secondly, the difficulty of finding somebody to consent on the other side. Yet Tom Raggles did marry in the face of all difficulties; and, piling wonder upon wonder, he married a young wife.

Barbara Flight was the daughter of the widow of a purser in the navy, and lived in a retired way in the suburbs. It was said that Mrs. Flight had been a flame of Tom's in his younger

days, and that the purser, being obliged to join his ship suddenly, pressed his suit with such vigour that he carried off the lady while Tom was deliberating over a proposal. The report might have been only a flying scandal, but certain it was that Tom, when he had renounced all other social enjoyments, was a frequent visitor in the evenings at Mrs. Flight's. Some people surmised that he was courting the widow, for it never entered into anybody's head to suspect him of a design upon the daughter, who had only just turned twenty. And we are bound to add that it never entered into his own head to suspect himself of such a design. It grew over him like a net, and he was not at all aware of it till he was caught in it.

Barbara Flight was a slender girl, with very light hair, light eyes, and a light complexion. Her mind was colourless *en suite*. She was very easily amused, had no opinion of her own, took impressions as fast as they came, and lost them with equal facility. If Barbara could be said to have had a decided trait in her character, it was a love of dumb animals, especially cats and birds. Perhaps it was because they were the only parts of the creation over which she could hope to exercise any power (which Mr. Pope says is the predominant passion of women, whether they are strong or feeble), and because she could talk on a-head to them in her own light, prattling, no-meaning way, without check or restraint. While Tom Raggles and her mother were engaged in musty old talk about old times, and the wonderful changes that had taken place in the world since they were first acquainted, interspersed with practical observations on the price of provisions, Barbara was usually employed in playing hide-and-seek in a great chair with a kitten, or whispering, like a *siffleur*, with her canary. Whenever she was drawn into the larger conversation, it was only as audience, for she rarely hazarded an original remark.

Tom Raggles took very little notice of Barbara in the beginning: he looked upon her as a child amusing herself about the room. But Barbara was growing up into a habit with him without his knowing it, and he came to miss her at last when she happened to be out of the way. Habit is a great tyrant with lean, lonely people, when their lives become contracted, and their sympathies narrowed to a solitary point. How this habit grew upon him more and more by stealthy, imperceptible degrees,—how unconscious Barbara was of it,—how little she thought about Mr. Raggles, or anybody or anything else, except the cat and the bird,—and how oddly it all

came round to a discovery one evening, arising out of something Mr Raggles said, without intending it,—need not be related in detail. It will be enough to observe, that Mr. Raggles went home that night wondering at himself, and wondering at Barbara, and in such an obscure state of mind that he went to bed with his cravat on.

The next day he didn't believe a word of it. He was like a man getting up out of a dream, and the daylight and its occupations put it all out of his thoughts; and when he set out in the evening to visit Mrs. Flight as usual, he had a feeling of buoyancy, and a gay sort of giiddiness in his step, which was new to him, and which was the only token he could detect in himself of any change that had been wrought in him. But when he arrived at the house, he suddenly felt himself very sick and tremulous; and when Mrs. Flight asked him what was the matter, he felt as if his head would fly off, and as if his ears were burning and cracking down to the roots. He supposed that he was expected to say something about the evening before, and that the best thing he could say would be something jocose, to turn it all off into a laugh; but the more he tried to think of a joke, the more he couldn't think of anything but a dismal mist that was before his eyes, dancing up and down like a phantasmagoria. As for Barbara, she was nursing her cat as unconcernedly as if nothing had happened, a spectacle of guileless simplicity which smote him to the heart, and made him feel wretchedly guilty, although he could not tell why or wherefore.

Mrs. Flight was a very sensible woman, and saw how it was quite plainly. She therefore allowed Mr. Raggles to go on from bad to worse, knowing that the more he floundered in the net the more he must entangle and exhaust himself. Clever as he was in other ways, he was no match for Mrs. Flight. But there was nothing remarkable in that. When a woman sets about a business of this sort, she has ways of compassing her ends which sharper faculties than Tom Raggles could boast of cannot penetrate.

Watching her opportunity judiciously, after he had committed himself over and over again by the strangeness of his behaviour, and by tumbling into the pits she had laid for him, Mrs. Flight opened the affair herself in an indirect manner, and with a motherly tenderness which totally bewildered him. She considered such a union out of all reason; she never was more surprised in her life than when she first began to suspect

that he had thoughts of her daughter; Barbara was quite a child, and she was sure that such an idea as marriage had never entered her mind; he was old enough to be her father, and one would imagine that, instead of going on for fifty, as he must be from what she remembered him, he was a spanking young fellow of five-and-twenty; but she had such a regard for him, for the sake of old times, that if she really could bring herself to believe that it was for his happiness, she hardly knew what to say about it; but nothing could induce her to bias the poor child's inclinations in such a matter, so he must not build up his hopes, like a foolish boy, upon her influence. These little obstacles, which came so naturally in the way, were irresistible; and Tom Raggles, as unconscious of what he was doing as if he had been making a speech in his sleep, declared that he was downright miserable (which he was), that he could not tell how it happened (which was true also), and that he hoped she would break it to Barbara, and make him a happy man, or some stuttering exclamation to that effect. There is a regular course in these things, and when a man goes to a certain point he thinks he must go on; and so Raggles went on, till the declaration was duly made and clenched.

Mrs. Flight represented the business to her daughter with all the requisite maternal caution. She was quite aware, she said, of the disproportion between their ages; but, then, Raggles was not so old as he looked by many years, and there were some men who were younger at forty than other men at two-and-twenty; besides, she had known Raggles from his childhood, and, if *she* were to make a choice, there was nobody to whom she could so safely trust her dear child, he was such a good man, so thoughtful and kind, and then he was so well off; and what a blessing it would be to her to think that, if anything should happen to her (and she knew she hadn't a great many years to live), her darling would be so comfortably provided for; indeed, she looked upon it altogether as a most providential circumstance, and could hardly persuade herself that it was true until she should see them both come home from church, and eating the wedding dinner; and wouldn't they have a merry-making that day!

It is possible that Barbara, for the first time in her life, may have ventured upon this occasion to think a little on her own account; but she did not say much to her mother about it, beyond giving her accustomed mechanical assent to what she had been saying, and her mother did not press her much

at this time for an answer, leaving the providential circumstance to operate in silence upon her mind. For a day or two Barbara was not quite as easy as usual, and had a terror of meeting Mr. Raggles, but it passed off like a summer cloud; and on the following Sunday Mrs. Flight had the satisfaction of hearing her daughter called in church, and of seeing the people standing up on tip-toe in their pews to look at her.

Nor was she disappointed in the wedding-dinner. It took place at her own house; and supreme was her delight when a chaise and pair appeared at the door to convey the happy couple, in the dusk of the evening, to an inn about five miles off, where they were to spend a honeymoon of two clear days.

It would be desirable to draw the curtain at once upon the lovers, for the reader knows well enough what usually ensues upon the marriage of January and May; but the necessities of our narrative require that we should glance at them in their own house, and see how they got on when the bridal ardour had abated, and they dropped down again into their natural characters under the action of new circumstances.

When Mr. Raggles brought home his wife, he found that he did not exactly know what to do with her. He had made no calculation of the extensive changes which are produced by the appearance of a mistress in the *ménage* of an old bachelor. While the place was new to her, Mrs. Raggles was perpetually running in and out of the rooms, and up and down the stairs, and flirting into the shop, and ringing the bells, and ordering the maid-of-all-work about, and sending out the shopman, with whom we have already made acquaintance in the person of Richard Rawlings, on trivial messages, and creating a hubbub and disturbance all day long; proceedings which effectually broke up the clockwork routine of the house. Mr. Raggles was fairly taken aback by this extraordinary sprightliness of motion; nor could he comprehend how that quiet girl, who purred about her mother's little parlour so noiselessly, could have become so troublesome all of a sudden. But Raggles was not a profound man on some subjects, and, least of all, on the philosophy of female character.

The young wife, upon her translation to a house of her own, thought she was to have everything her own way, or, rather, she never thought about it, but, by an instinct common to most newly-married ladies, particularly to such as men fall in love with for their shyness and timidity, she sprang

somewhat too eagerly into possession. The feeling of being released from restraint, and made, as she supposed, mistress of her actions, had loosened the pent-up vivacity of girlhood, and carried her away on a spring-tide of animal spirits. It may have been, also, that she derived a few salutary hints from her mother upon the importance of establishing her domestic authority in the first instance, and that she knew no better way of setting about it than that of making a prodigious rattle, to the total disruption of the peace and economy of the household.

If Mrs. Raggles had committed an error of judgment in imagining that she was to enter upon a career of perfect freedom and independence, Mr. Raggles, on his part, had fallen into a mistake equally delusive, and, perhaps, less excusable in a person of his age and experience. He confidently believed that he had married a patient Grisel, whose voice would never be heard in the house, who would tread his stairs like a mouse, do exactly as she was desired, and never interfere with his business. Within a week they were mutually undeceived; and then began a struggle for the upper hand, which speedily brought matters to a clearer understanding between them.

Had Mrs. Raggles inherited some of her mother's tact and sagacity, she might have gained a few advantages in the civil war. But it is useless to speculate upon such an hypothesis. Mrs. Raggles was not endowed with the requisite strength of will, womanly wit, or keenness of perception, to enable her to come off the field of battle with a single trophy. She was routed at all points, horse and foot, ignominiously made prisoner, and shut up in her own room. Several diversions were attempted in her favour by Mrs. Flight; but the old lady, formidable at close quarters, was repulsed with disgrace, and forbidden the house.

The victory Mr. Raggles had thus secured was infinitely more decisive than if he had started a *casus belli* on the wedding-day, and established his authority by a *coup de main*. That process, which has often failed, might have bred secret discontents and conspiracies, and kept him under arms for the rest of his life. But both parties had now fairly tried their strength, and the result was conclusive.

Mrs. Raggles consequently sank into a life of passive obedience. She was treated like a puppet, Mr. Raggles having an inexorable grasp of the wires. The disparity between their ages took off something of the edge of this sharp prac-

tice, for, as they had very little in common between them in the way of tastes and sentiments, it was no great penalty to her to be left to herself, and relieved from the trouble of thinking how she should act. It was a sort of existence which agreed wonderfully with the ductility of her nature. Nobody could ever have supposed that she was unhappy. Once she had settled down into tacit acquiescence she was as content as a child, that having been punished for a fault, quickly forgets its tears, and hides itself in a corner to amuse itself. As to that melancholy blank in the affections which sentimental novelists would have us believe invariably supervenes upon ill-assorted marriages, it would be affectation to pretend that Mrs. Raggles underwent any secret suffering of the kind. If Mr. Raggles did not awaken any tender emotions in her heart, she was amply compensated by the attachment of her Angola cat, upon whom she lavished her vacant caresses.

In this manner Mr. and Mrs. Raggles lived together for a space of three years, which brings us to the point of time at which our history commences. In the meanwhile, to the inconsolable grief of a numerous circle of friends, to whom she was endeared by the practice of every virtue that could adorn a pious Christian, Mrs. Flight had taken wing to heaven.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH CONDUCTS US TO THE FOOT OF THE LADDER.

WHILE Richard Rawlings was creeping softly up the stairs to the sick man's chamber, Mrs. Raggles was seated in the little parlour at the back of the shop, engaged in a consolatory conversation with Nurse Waters, who had just resigned her charge to Mr. Pogeey, and come down to take her ease for a while over a potation of hot rum-and-water. The remains of a cold fowl, a bottle and glasses, a posset basin, and one or two medicine phials, were on the table, and ranging amongst the plates and dishes, with bland and graceful step, was a large Angola cat.

"There's no good in frettin' yourself," observed Nurse Waters; "leave trouble a day's march behind you, and look out a-head. Life's a journey, and them that lives best on the road can keep up the longest. Never look back!"

Nurse Waters was the individual alluded to by Crikey Snaggs as the "widder." Her real history was rather

obscure. Nobody actually knew whether she was a widow or not, and it was a subject upon which she never showed any inclination to enlighten her acquaintance. She had lived in Yarlton for a space of nine years, and was known there as the Widow Waters. Her occupations were multifarious. She went out as a nurse, or as anything else to fill up a temporary gap in a household. There were various speculations afloat about her widowhood, for as she did not choose to publish her biography, the particulars were supplied by the invention of her neighbours. Some said that they did not believe she was ever married; and others, that they shrewdly suspected, if she had ever had a husband, he must have been hanged or transported. But she pursued the even tenor of her course, regardless of these ill-natured innuendos, and managed to make out a precarious livelihood in spite of them, and to ingratiate herself wherever she was employed, by taking a greater interest in other people's family concerns than she seemed to take in her own. Nurse Waters was a thin, wiry woman, with a prominent aquiline nose and sharp features, a shrewd, practical woman who stood upon her experience, and was peculiarly qualified to supply the place of the lamented Mrs. Flight, in the counsels of Mrs. Raggles, at this trying crisis of her life.

"He was too old for you, dear," continued Nurse Waters; "you didn't expect to go before him, did you? It's in the hands of heaven, and you'd better dry your eyes and leave it there. If it was me, I'd make up my mind to it. Never look back! It's the future that's everything to us all."

"Very true," replied Mrs. Raggles, parting with both hands her long hair, which had been much disordered by the violence of her emotions, and was continually falling over her face; "but, after all, you know, he was my husband."

"So he was, dear," returned Nurse Waters, "there's no denying that; and, as long as he was your husband, you did what was right by him. But it isn't because he was your husband, that you're to fret yourself to fiddlestrings for him. I don't mean to disparage the poor man; but I say, that there's no man worth grieving after. As to myself, all mankind's dead to me, and I've nothing to look to but myself; but in your case, Mrs. Raggles, dear, it's a horse of another colour. It ain't for a young woman like you, with the world before you, to break your heart for a husband that was old enough to be your father."

"Close upon sixty," replied Mrs. Raggles; "but, for all that, he'll leave worse behind him."

"There never was a worse but there was a worser," rejoined Nurse Waters.

"My poor mother used to say," said Mrs. Raggles, "that none knows how an ugly shoe fits but them that wears it."

"True for her," returned the widow; "but you know, in the course of nature, it must wear out."

"Don't say that, nurse," replied Mrs. Raggles; "don't say that; don't talk of a human being wearing out like a shoe. It hurts me."

"And didn't the ugly shoe hurt you, too, dear?" replied Nurse Waters. "Now between ourselves, and you know I have your interest at heart, wasn't he a cruel screw to you? What pleasure had you with him at all? It isn't to say that you were shut up like a bird in a cage, and hung up in a dark room till you lost your music, dear, for a woman wouldn't mind that if she was comfortable elseways, but when did he ever speak a pleasant word to you? Was he the man to say to you, 'Babby, dear, it's New Year's Day, or it's Easter Monday, or it's your birthday, and many happy returns of the same to you?'"

"No—no," returned Mrs. Raggles, re-adjusting her hair.

"And as to his being a good provider," continued Nurse Waters; "drat them all, that's the way they get out of it. A good provider! Why, he was bound by law to provide for you. Who thanks a husband for what one eats and drinks? That's the least they can do for the aches and pains we go through for them. And if he was a good provider, I wonder has he taken care to leave you comfortable behind him?"

Mrs. Raggles shook her head.

"That's the point, dear," resumed Nurse Waters; "have you turned in your mind what you're going to do with the place when he's gone?"

"I never once thought of it," replied Mrs. Raggles.

"Then you ought," returned the widow, half-closing her eyes, and stooping over in a whisper, "and the sooner the better. I know how things go when a woman's left unprotected, and you oughtn't to be unprotected long, that's another thing. Now will you take a bit of advice from an old woman, dear?"

The Angola at this moment made a sudden whisk of her tail that nearly put out the candle.

"Take care of the candle, beauty!" exclaimed Mrs. Raggles; "it musn't burn its darling tail, my precious! It wants something, does it? P-r-r-r. I'm sure it can't be hungry after the supper it made;" whereupon she proceeded to tempt its appetite with a side-bone, carefully stripping off the flesh into delicate morsels, upon which the favourite regaled itself with the fastidious hesitation of an epicure.

The widow remarked what a great beauty of a cat it was, slyly throwing in a hope that Mrs. Raggles would have something better to pet by and by; at which Mrs. Raggles coloured up, and the widow resumed the thread of her discourse.

"I was sayin'," she observed, "that it was high time for you to think of yourself. Everything's at sixes and sevens, and there's no tellin' what plunderin' goes on when there's nobody to look after a house. You ought to get a friend to see to it for you."

"But who can I get?" said Mrs. Raggles.

"Well then, indeed," replied Nurse Waters, "I've no very good opinion, as you know, of menkind, for, I'll tell the honest truth, I think them all much alike, as far as that goes; but we can't do without them sometimes, and more particular when there's a death in a family. You ought to have a man, dear, to look into the business for you, and I think we can find one that would do it and be glad."

"Who?" inquired Mrs. Raggles.

"Who?" responded the widow, humorously crimping her lips; "who? What do you think of Mr. Poge, dear?"

"Mr. Poge?" exclaimed Mrs. Raggles, with a look of astonishment.

"There's no such another in the town," continued Nurse Waters; "if Poge took up the business it would be as good as done; and from what I have heard him say of you——"

"Of me?" said Mrs. Raggles, her face becoming suddenly suffused in a glow of scarlet; "what in the world could he ever have to say of me?"

"Nothing but what was becomin' in him to say," replied the widow; "what makes you blush, dear? Is it because Poge's a bachelour?" she added, with a glittering blink of one eye.

"How can you go on so?" said Mrs. Raggles, shockingly confused.

"If you have Poge to your friend," continued the widow, "you're a made woman for life."

"But——"

"I don't heed your buts," interrupted Nurse Waters; "he's a bachelour, and has an eye in his head. That's enough; I'll say no more. Look for'ard, dear, that's all! The widow's cap's uncommon becomin' to fair hair."

Mrs. Raggles was sadly fluttered at these unseasonable remarks. She thought it cruel and unnatural in Nurse Waters to introduce such a subject at such a moment; she was very much vexed with her; she was so much vexed that it put everything else out of her head; and, although she was very angry with herself for it, she could not help, all she could do, wondering what on earth Pogey could have said about her, and how she should look in a widow's cap.

While she was revolving these matters in her mind, the door opened, and Joey made her appearance. It was impossible to mistake the frightful glare of her face. Joey tried to articulate, but, instead of words, only uttered a husky cry, and, throwing her apron over her head, began to work her knuckles into her eyes. Nurse Waters saw how it was, and, telling Mrs. Raggles to keep herself quiet, desired Joey to deliver her message.

It was to tell Mrs. Raggles to hasten up stairs. Mr. Pogey had sent for her.

Place, time, and circumstance make little difference in the Chamber of Death. Whether the hangings be of Genoa velvet or Manchester cotton matters little in the shadow of eternity which is over the silent room. Rich and poor, proud and humble, the wronged and the wrong-doer, are here brought to a common level. Their stormy passions, their grand projects, their great revenges,—what are they here in the Presence of the Dead?—a breath of air which thrills a leaf and passes on. What are our loves and hates here? our honours, our humiliations?—a poor fading dream! Upon this threshold the unreality of life is made clear to us, and we see the pageant vanishing before our eyes. Vain, distracted Love, frantic Jealousy, delusive Hope, Intellect that has ruled, and Beauty that has agitated the world,—what space do ye fill here in this narrow passage between the two lives of the Past and the Future?—bubbles of light that float into the twilight and disappear. Bow down rebuked, poor broken heart of earth, and, beneath the veil of the falling darkness, pray for grace to forgive and be forgiven.

When Richard entered the room where Raggles lay, and

saw the eyes of the dying man looking anxiously towards the door, as if watching for his coming, he felt, for the first time, something like a sentiment of pity and pardon for all that had passed between them. It was no time for human resentments. The earthy flavour of the atmosphere which sometimes precedes, and always follows death in ill-ventilated rooms, was heavy and oppressive. A ghastly change had taken place in the features of the old man since he had seen him only a few hours before: the skin had assumed a leaden hue, and had shrunk into the cheeks, the eyes were glassy, the lips livid and compressed, and the nostrils dilated. Even Mr. Poge, who stood at the bedside, appeared struck by the alteration, and, beckoning Richard into a corner, told him in rather a pompous and oracular way that Raggles had not many minutes to live, that he had been calling for him so wildly and vehemently that he was sure there was something on his mind; and then, branching off into a rambling allusion to the wonderful action of the mind upon the body, and the body upon the mind, he warned Richard that the patient might go off like a snuff with the least over-excitement, and that he must be careful to hear what he had to say, without flurrying him by questions or remarks. The precaution was necessary, for Richard was deeply affected by the scene before him. But he had a painful consciousness that Mr. Poge was superior to such emotions.

He approached the bed noiselessly, and looked earnestly at Raggles, hoping to attract his attention without speaking, but, although Raggles' eyes were fixed upon him, he was apparently unconscious of his presence.

At last Richard said in a low voice, "Richard, sir."

"Richard!" repeated Raggles.

"You wished to see me, sir."

"Ah! ha!—are you there, Richard?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where? where? let me feel your hand;" and, spreading out his wasted fingers, he muttered, "send them away."

Richard silently motioned Mr. Poge to leave them together. But Mr. Poge had no intention to go. Perhaps he was a little curious to ascertain the nature of the revelation he supposed the patient was about to make. So he made a sign that he would remain concealed behind the curtains. Ceremony was out of the question on such an occasion, and Richard, quietly moving over to the door, and, opening it

wide, motioned Mr. Pogeey to withdraw. The decision of his manner very much astonished the apothecary, who, evidently disconcerted at his summary ejection, flounced out, with a glance at the sick man, and another at Richard, by which he meant to convey an expression of profound indignation.

Having closed the door, Richard resumed his place at the bedside.

"Well, sir," he said.

"Are we alone?" cried Raggles.

"Yes," returned Richard.

"Richard!" cried Raggles, "stoop down—lower, lower."

Richard placed his ear close to the dying man's mouth, and with difficulty gathered a few unconnected words.

"Did you hear me?" screamed Raggles, in an angry voice.

"Where did you say, sir?" inquired Richard.

"Ah! ha! down—down—in that drawer—ah! Lord pity me!—what a time you are; have you got them?"

The drawer, to which Raggles directed him, was in a table close to the bed.

"It is locked," said Richard, having in vain attempted to open it.

"Ah! Lord," cried Raggles, "make haste—the keys—under the pillow——"

Richard searched under the pillow, and found a bunch of keys. He tried them in succession, and at last the drawer yielded.

"Have you got it?" cried Raggles, gasping with impatience.

"Is this it?" asked Richard, drawing out an old pocket-book, fastened with a clasp, and carefully tied round the ends and sides with tape.

"Let me feel—let me feel—ah! ha!—in that! stoop, don't let them hear me?"

From the violence of his excitement his voice had become fainter, and he whispered again in Richard's ear with a great effort. The communication this time was more clear than before, and when Richard had collected its meaning, a visible shudder passed over his face.

"Do you hear?" screamed Raggles, in an agony of mental and physical torture.

"Every word," returned Richard; "shall I open it now?"

"No—no—no—not now. Ah! Lord pity me!—listen!" Richard bent down again, and the drowning voice gurgled fearfully in his ear.

"I have signed the papers," said Raggles, his words be-

coming more indistinct and his respiration more difficult; "those—in the pocket-book—I am dying, Richard—dying—Lord, forgive me my sins!—this weighed heaviest of all—I never told it—nobody knows it—but you—you—if they knew it, they would seize all—you will stand between us—Richard!—I can't see your face—you will do it?"

"I promise it," replied Richard, who, not being familiar with death, was terribly shaken by the contortions which shook the frame of the old man.

"Hide it—hide it!" gasped out the dying man; "it's very dark—dark—pray for me, Richard!—pray for me!—kneel down!—let me hear you pray!"

And Richard bent down and prayed aloud.

The miserable old man had his deathbed secret, and in the end had no one to confide it to but the drudge, whose spirit he had bruised and crushed. Who is there that in his lifetime has not been burdened with some secret, of which the world has had no suspicion? Beneath the surface of society, as beneath the waters of the ocean, strange things are engulfed and hidden, and as rarely, too, brought up to the light. The gay boon-companion, whose radiant mirth infects the table with laughter—who knows what gloomy thoughts lie in the depths of his solitude? The pattern husband, whose house is the Elysium of domestic bliss; the bride, who wears her orange flower with such an air of tender happiness; the irreproachable merchant, whose life is a homily on the Exchange; the divine, whose meek piety draws tears from the congregation; who shall tell us what canker is corroding at their hearts in the midst of the flutter of life? And Raggles had his secret, like the rest of us; it had been pent up in the loneliness of an uncomfortable existence, and it was an ease and consolation to him to give vent to it at last.

While Richard was kneeling at the bedside the door opened, and Mr. Pogeey came in, followed by Mrs. Raggles and Nurse Waters. It was solemn and wretched enough to see them gathering round, and kneeling down, and burying their heads in the clothes, and to hear the stifled sobs of Mrs. Raggles. But he who lay there was insensible to the sights and sounds of this world. His spirit had passed away.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE READER MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF MR. POGGY.

ONE of the principal shops in the market-place of Yarlton was closed; the blinds of the windows up the front of the house were neatly drawn down; two mutes, in holiday black, with tall poles in their hands, kept guard at the door, like churchyard halberdiers; and the street was as still as if it had been a Sabbath morning, hardly anybody being abroad except a few neighbours standing about at their doors, and a group of urchins watching the gestures of the mutes with great curiosity, to see what was to come next.

In a country town Death discharges the functions of a coroner. He summonses the inhabitants to sit upon an inquest. Or he may be described as the curator of an anatomical school, which he supplies with bodies for the public at large to cut up. The subject given out for dissection in this instance was the character of the late Mr. Raggles; and it was dissected accordingly. The result of the *post-mortem* examination, we are afraid, was not very satisfactory; but it presented no interruption to the decorum which the English habitually observe on such occasions. Indeed, the only faces that could not be said to harmonise strictly with the general gravity were those of the mutes, two carbuncled and dissipated-looking individuals, whose efforts to get up a funereal sadness in their swollen features had, it must be owned, rather a contrary effect upon the spectators.

The arrangements within-doors were confided to Mr. Pogey, who took all the trouble of that melancholy business upon himself, showing an alacrity that more than justified the lavish encomiums of Nurse Waters. Mr. Pogey was a fussy little man, with a wonderful fund of animal spirits, and an intimate knowledge of the details connected with weddings, christenings, burials, pic-nics, balls, and social meetings of every kind. It made no difference to him whether he was called upon to officiate in the house of pleasure or the house of mourning, so long as he had a predominant hand in the affair. Nature had gifted him with a genius for the bustle and ordering of such transactions.

Mr. Pogey was the architect of his own fortunes, as the saying goes, and owed all his successes to indomitable perse-

verance and overwhelming vivacity. He had fortunately entered the profession long before the legislature had hit upon the Apothecaries' Act, which requires that candidates shall be slightly qualified for admission. Having served a short apprenticeship in sweeping out a druggist's shop, he set up for himself, and carried everything before him by the force of that facial confidence which puts all other sorts of merit to the rout. He laid out his stock of knowledge to the best possible advantage; and whenever his science happened to be at a loss, he appealed triumphantly to common sense against the humbug of medical mysteries. A system of practice so flattering to the understandings of his patients secured him a wide popularity, which his social talents, his skill in telling stories and quoting books, and his constitutional hilarity, daily extended. The regular humdrum faculty had no chance with the million against Mr. Pogey.

His management of the obsequies of Mr. Raggles was perfect. Having settled all the necessary preliminaries in an interview with his "own" undertaker, and decided upon the programme of the funeral, which was to consist of a respectable hearse and a coach to convey six persons, his next care was to bespeak an agreeable spot in the churchyard, and an economical tablet, with an inscription upon it of his own composition. Upon all these items he effected a considerable saving, being, as he explained to the widow, so good a customer to the sexton and the undertaker that they were always glad to oblige him on the cheapest terms.

These indispensable preparations being duly completed, and the house put into order, he invited a few friends to attend on the morning of the ceremony, including Mr. John Peabody, whose company, in the paucity of more intimate connexions, was requested, on the suggestion of Richard Rawlings. Mr. Pogey kindly undertook to act as chief mourner himself.

While the guests were assembling in the parlour, Mrs. Raggles, by the instructions of Mr. Pogey, was closely chambered up-stairs with her sympathising companion, Nurse Waters.

The morning was clear and frosty, and very cold. Nurse Waters discreetly avoided much conversation, leaving Mrs. Raggles free to indulge in the ruminations incidental to her situation. It would be difficult to convey an accurate impression of the fugitive reflections that chased each other over the surface of Mrs. Raggles' mind during the agitating

hour that preceded the departure of the funeral. So long as the body lay in the house, she could hardly persuade herself that she really was a widow. The presence of the old man still seemed to possess itself of the place, and her heart beat strangely under the influence of that feeling. But she thought of what Nurse Waters had said about the widow's cap; and the image of her fair hair folded up beneath its snowy borders flitted coquettishly before her. Then, by an involuntary association of ideas, Mr. Pogeey presented himself, and, although she felt the tears coming into her eyes, she was conscious of a little secret womanly exultation at the compliments he paid her upon her appearance. By-and-by the widow's cap was put aside, and her hair was released, and she had once more a choice of colours, and could suit her complexion as she pleased. Then there were little excursions into the country, and nobody to watch her, and she might be as capricious as the wind, go in and out when she liked, make pleasant acquaintances, and visit them, and have nice parties of her own, her imagination at this point venturing even into a dance; and, notwithstanding that Mr. Pogeey seemed to exercise a sort of spell over the future, she resolved that neither Mr. Pogeey, nor anybody else, should control her actions. She had been kept down long enough; but she was now her own mistress, and liberty was sweet, and she was determined to enjoy it. In the midst of these discursive meditations, some movements in the house suddenly recalled her to a sense of her present circumstances, the pageant vanished, and she lapsed back again into a reverie in which the apparition of her late husband displaced the florid vision of the gay Mr. Pogeey.

In the meanwhile the party below stairs were solemnly regaling themselves with cake and wine. Pogeey related two or three capital stories of incidents and coincidences that had happened to him on similar occasions; and imparted such a flavour of subdued pleasantry to the scene, keeping, however, within legitimate bounds, that he effectually dissipated the predisposition to be dismal which the mourners had brought into the room. He saw no necessity for giving way to uncomfortable sensations; and was of opinion that the true philosophy of life consisted in making the best of a calamity. John Peabody perfectly agreed with him, and asked him specially to take a glass of wine, and, like genuine optimists, they clinked their glasses gently together, Mr. Pogeey good-

humouredly declaring that he never prescribed any draught for his friends with half so much pleasure as a glass of good old wine. John Peabody was delighted with this disinterested sentiment; and from that moment Mr. Pogeey booked him as a patient.

"What do you say, Higgs?" cried Pogeey, addressing a tall, pallid man, who looked as if he had been dieted all his life upon sour apples and water; "eh, Higgs? Wine, my boy!—immortal wine—the best of all physic—eh, Higgs?"

"Ah! doctor," returned Higgs, coughing sepulchraly; "it's all constitution, you know."

"Something in that, Higgs; but a man's constitution is like a Stilton cheese; steep it well in wine, my boy, and it will grow mellow. The poets, you know, who are capital judges, recommend wine—rosy wine—so do I. But you don't trouble yourself much about the poets—something more substantial to think of, eh, Higgs?"

"That's it, doctor," said a burly, short-necked man, joining the group, with a full glass in his hand; "but life is short, as we see every day; and, as I say to Higgs, it's a duty we owe to our families to keep up the stamina."

"A duty," said Pogeey, "which no man has discharged more zealously than yourself. Why, it doesn't cost you five shillings a year in drugs."

"Well, on the word of a man," replied the other, sipping his wine, "I don't think it does."

"I wish all my friends were like you," observed Pogeey, giving the burly man a slight poke of his finger on his broad expanse of waistcoat; "you're my show patient. I always say, look at Fubsley! There's health for you! A deeply interesting case of natural health. If the departed had taken a leaf out of your book—eh, Fubsley—I could have ensured him a ten years' renewal. Poor Raggles—a thin liver—wonder he weathered it so long—slops and pills—pills and slops—all artificial—trusted nothing to Nature. Now, my advice is, consult Nature. She's the best physician. Latterly, Raggles lost his appetite; how could he expect to keep it? Appetite, as the divine Shakspeare says, grows upon feeding. That's the grand secret. Take a racehorse; you must feed him well to keep him up to his work. Just the same with a man. The first question I put to a patient is, 'How is your appetite?' If the appetite's gone, we must create one; if we can't, we must treat him *secundum artem*, which, stript of

humbug, means that we must do the best we can. That's common sense, I believe—eh, Higgs?"

"Good plain reason," observed Fubsley, "and no mystification. That's what I say; show me the reason of it, and I'll swallow a doctor's shop, bottles and all. But to see a guy of a fellow creaking into your room, shaking his head, and creaking out again without leaving you a bit the wiser—that's what I call downright imposture."

"I must confess," said Pogey, "it looks very like it; but you mustn't abuse the faculty, my good fellow. There are *some* honest men amongst them: as to myself, everybody knows I abhor humbug. No man shall take my drugs without knowing the reason why. That's my system. What does a man pay his money for? Hasn't he a right to know the nature of his own case, so that he can judge for himself? I hate doctoring in the dark. But the faculty must live, you know; and if people choose to destroy the coats of their stomachs, stop the circulation of the blood, and paralyse the nervous economy, by drenching themselves with mixtures they know nothing about, they must take the consequences, that's all. For my part, I'd rather keep my patients alive and hearty. That's my object. Look at Fubsley; there's a specimen, and no mistake!" and the burly illustration of Pogey's system was constrained to submit to another triumphant poke in the waistcoat, which nearly upset the glass that shook in his hand under the vibration of a violent chuckle.

A counter-joke of Fubsley's was cut short by a heavy sound that came down the stairs at brief intervals; and presently the muffled scuffling of feet through the hall announced the close of the preliminary solemnity. Then came the jaunty undertaker, with a wardrobe of cloaks and hatbands on his arm. Pogey, as chief-mourner, was robed first, and then the rest in succession, all in dumb show. Richard Rawlings was the last. His hand trembled as he tried on a pair of black gloves.

"Too large for you," whispered the undertaker, handing him a smaller pair. "You should always have 'em a little tight."

"These are too small," said Richard.

"Not a morsel," whispered the undertaker, working them on his fingers. "Curious thing happened the other day with this same pair. You don't wear a ring?"

"No—no—make haste."

"A gentleman," continued the undertaker, "that was a

tryin' of 'em on, as it might be you—in forcin' of 'em he found a ring in that very finger."

"A ring! how was that?"

"Why, somebody, you see, had been a tryin' of 'em afore, and I suppose they wer'n big enough, and so in pullin' of 'em off, off comes the ring, without his missin' of it in the hurry; and there it laid in the finger till the gloves were a wanted again. Very odd, wasn't it? There's some sort of a fate in these here gloves, I do believe. They fit you exact."

Richard did not pay much attention to the undertaker's story, as the company were already leaving the room, Mr. Pogey having led the way into the street, where several persons had assembled. The coach was at the door, and the hearse a little in advance. The undertaker glided out to his post, and, letting down the steps, received the chief-mourner in due form. Pogey paused complacently for a moment or two, looked round, recognised a few faces, nodded familiarly to them, and stepped in, followed by the rest of the mourners, whose blooming cheeks, with the exception of Mr. Higgs, who looked more ghastly than usual, showed that they had not been wanting in respectful oblations to the memory of the departed. The procession then moved off, attended by a straggling retinue, to the churchyard.

Here Mr. Pogey appeared to great advantage. When the last rites were ended, and "earth to earth" had given out its hollow sound, and the grave-diggers were pausing over their shovels, he drew from his pocket a large sheet of paper, which he slowly unfolded, and, calling the attention of his friends to the epitaph that was inscribed upon it, he began, after a formal preparation, to read it aloud in a grand voice, undulating with rhythmical cadences. It set forth that the stone was sacred to the memory of Thomas Raggles, of that parish, whose soul had shaken off its mundane ties, and, spurning the earth, had ascended to its native skies; and then, enumerating his exemplary virtues as a husband and a son, which ensured him a heavenly crown when his worldly race was run, it called upon the Passenger to stop and drop a tear, winding up by recommending him to pray, that he might be able to give as good an account of himself on the Resurrection Day.

The reading of this affecting epitaph went to the hearts of the excited listeners. Fubsley's eyes looked very watery and tender, and Higgs's cough was brought on afresh by the severity of his emotions. Even Pogey himself could hardly

control his agitation, and when he recovered himself a little, he thanked them for the indulgence with which they had received his unworthy tribute to their dear friend, and modestly reminded them that, although it was entirely his own composition, the merit of it was to be ascribed solely to the subject.

Richard witnessed this scene with feelings of a different kind. He saw in it the realisation of the apotheosis which his imagination had conjured up in the solitude of his own room, when he was making that secret inquisition into Raggles' affairs of which he was now beginning to discern the practical advantages. Here was the body of the cruel old man, reverently followed to the grave by "troops of friends," who stood, with their hats off, echoing a panegyric on his virtues. There was not one amongst them who did not know the meanness, heartlessness, and falsehood of his life, and who did not secretly feel that the character given to him in the inscription was a monstrous lie from beginning to end. Yet they pretended to believe that this wretched miser, who added arrant hypocrisy to the rest of his sins, was the best of husbands and sons, and that he had ascended straight to heaven to receive a crown of glory! How is this? thought Richard, who, brought up in the school of adversity, had little experience in the hollow pomp of social vanities, and was simple enough to see what was passing around him in its true light, and to call it by its right name. How is it that men can thus be brought to dissimulate their real convictions, and prostrate themselves before an object they despise? Why, gold does it all! Gold will buy up the consciences of men, and purchase homage for wealthy knavery, while honesty in rags goes begging through the world. Here was this great lesson impressed upon him in a special manner by an example springing up out of his own personal observation.

It was a sight never to be forgotten—a dark moral drawn from his own sufferings, and re-acting forcibly upon a temperament that had acquired a morbid sensibility from the habit of brooding over the wrongs of fortune. And then he remembered that a strange turn of circumstances had unexpectedly improved his position, and opened a path to him by which he might make his way to independence. He fancied he saw how this was to be accomplished. That morning, which deposited the remains of old Thomas Raggles in the grave, dawned with a new life for him: one generation was gone out, and another, full of hope and energy, was ascending upon its ruins; the course was clear before him; he was already, by

unlooked-for chances, invested with the means to enter upon it; he was the recipient of Raggles' secret; it was the lever by which he was to raise himself to power, and become possessed of the talisman of wealth before which the gates of palaces and the hearts of men fly open. His spirit bounded within him as these glowing pictures of the future took form and colour in his thoughts, and he was hardly conscious that the people were dropping away from the ground, when he was startled by the pressure of a hand upon his shoulder.

"Come, man, rouse yourself! It *was* rather melting, I own—that touch about the Resurrection Day hit them hard—eh! Rawlings?" exclaimed the cheerful voice of Mr. Poge; "but you mustn't mind everything one puts into an epitaph, you know. When you're a rich man, and can afford a handsome family tomb, I'll write an inscription for you that will astonish the natives. Why, I didn't say half that I might have said about old Raggles!"

"Indeed!" said Richard, "why, it seems to me wonderful that you could have said so much."

"Pooh! pooh! I was obliged to keep it down on account of the expense; but I reserved the best things for the next occasion."

"What could you have added to his exemplary virtues and his heavenly crown?" inquired Richard; "I can think of nothing beyond that."

"You can't think, of course," rejoined Poge; "thinking is not your business, Rawlings. You haven't an inventive capacity—you're not a poet, my boy; a poet! I'll tell you as we walk along. You see I spoke of him only as a husband and a son; but, as I originally wrote it, I showed him up as a philanthropist and a patriot, threw in an allusion to British commerce and the wooden walls of old England, and ended by saying that he was the benefactor of the poor, the friend of the widow, and the protector of the orphan. Good that, eh?"

"You wrote that of Mr. Raggles?" said Richard;—"astounding!"

"I thought you'd say so. Ain't it good? eh! Isn't it good? But it isn't lost—too good to be lost. I have kept a copy, and it shall do duty for the next wealthy old buffer that drops off."

"To be sure," cried Richard; "the next *wealthy* old buffer—that's it—whether it suits him or not."

"What has that to do with it?" returned Poge; "suits him? You don't suppose when a man sits down to write an

epitaph he stops to consider whether it will suit. There would be an end to epitaphs if they were to be confined to facts. I know of no limit to the poetry of the churchyard except the cost of the stone and the cutting. That's the test of the virtues of the dead—eh! Rawlings? The man who has money enough to afford it may be buried under a glorification of Faith, Hope and Charity, heaped up as high as the Pyramids. I believe I am right—eh?”

“I believe you are,” slowly responded Richard.

They had now reached the carriage which was waiting for them on the high road. In his present mood, the keen and bracing air was more agreeable to Richard than the philosophical remarks of Mr. Pogeys, and he declined the seat which that gentleman urged him to resume.

“A walk will do me good,” said Richard; “I am jaded, and want a little exercise.”

“Well, you shall have your own way,” returned Pogeys; “but I must have a talk with you—on business. Come down to me this evening about seven. I shall be pretty well released by that time. Don't fail.”

Richard promised to come to him, and they separated, the party in the coach driving off gaily towards the town, and Richard striking by a footpath across the fields into the country.

Wonderfully bright was the landscape around him. The sun was shining down upon the meadows, and sparkling in hedge-rows, starred over with clinging icicles that hung like blossoms on the naked boughs. The grass was dry and crisp, and powdered with hoar-frost. A little black brook, leaping and running away under entangled meshes of osiers and brambles, sang gaily in his ears as he sauntered thoughtfully along. The sails of a mill catching the slanting rays, glistened fantastically at a little distance; and farther on the life of a farm in full activity expanded before him. Men were mounted in trees, clipping and lopping; others were carting from the field to the sheds for the stalled cattle, others chopping firewood, and some driving teams of oxen; horses were in movement between the haggard and the barn, and the merry flails were filling the rick-houses with their music. All was astir, alive—every hand was busy—every face was radiant with health and occupation. The sudden transition from the silent place of the dead to this open world of exertion and prosperous labour was a sensible relief. Richard Rawlings breathed more freely as he passed along amidst the hearty toils of his fellow-

men. There was an aspect of independence and self-reliance in these country sights that cheered and invigorated him, and gave him confidence in his own efforts. Industry and its rewards, typified by the teeming promises of the earth, were both before him. He saw the progress from small beginnings, in seeds and roots and watchful culture, to large results in the crowning harvest, whose superabundance was to be laid out at rich interest in future husbandry—he saw it all pictured as in a panorama. He saw clearly, too, the necessity for constant exertion and untiring vigilance to take advantage of shower and sunshine, to note the signs of the heavens and the bursting life of the soil, and to turn all to the account of one great end, ministered to by a multitude of varied and incessant operations. The lesson was not lost upon him, and his mind, springing onward to the distant sequel, heedless of all obstacles of time, place, and circumstance, already revelled over some grand, but as yet rather vague and confused, achievement.

All of us who can recall the fleeting dreams of our youth will remember the magnificent visions which have thus at times swept across our imagination, and in a moment of ecstasy carried us triumphantly to the remotest issues of our ambition, elevated the law student by a stroke of magic to the woolsack, and installed the incipient divine in the palace at Lambeth. Richard Rawlings had no definite scheme of life to work out; but he had a very distinct idea of the social importance of wealth, and to that tangible and intelligible object he strenuously resolved to dedicate his whole energies.

When a fixed purpose of this practical kind really sets in in youth it turns the mind grey at once. The pleasant fancies, the happy self-illusions, the wayside temptations that seem to belong to that season of life as naturally as crocuses and violets to spring, are trampled down to bud no more. The boy advances by a single stride into manhood, without experience of the combatants, or the conflicts, he is to encounter in the great arena; but prepared for the struggle by an instinct, often wiser than wisdom, and by a settled resolution which collects his powers, means, and opportunities, in a single direction, and gives cumulative force to every step he takes. Gladness vanishes from his face, and serious thoughts drink up its brightness and its roses. The boy has the gravity of the man, without that timidity and fitful distrust of onward effort which grow upon disappointment and the repressing knowledge of difficulties. We see this frequently in the common routine

of mechanical pursuits, drying up the nourishing springs of youth, and withering life at its roots; but in Richard Rawlings it took higher range and wider scope, and was sustained by a constitutional vigour and elasticity that acquired increased strength from concentration. The impressions made upon him during that long solitary, ruminating walk, were vividly remembered in after years, and often came back upon him when stranger changes than he then dreamed of had passed over his life.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. POGGY AT HOME.

THE morning glided away imperceptibly. The day was gone before Richard knew how it went; for time passes with wonderful rapidity when the imagination goes out idling. Curious as Richard was to know what Mr. Pogey wanted with him, his impatience on that point did not seem to make the intervening hours drag heavily; he was more curious upon more distant objects, on the way to which a day was but a grain of sand in the glass; and when he found himself at seven o'clock in the evening on the threshold of Mr. Pogey's dispensary, he was hardly conscious of how the interval had flown since morning. There he stood, hesitating for a moment, and collecting himself to meet the questioner with an impenetrable face. He knew Pogey to be a skilful searcher of other men's secrets, and he expected that he would probe him to the quick in the matter which had been confided to him by old Raggles. Let Pogey get anything out of him if he can. Pogey is a deep fellow, but it will take a longer line than his to sound Richard Rawlings. Turning the handle of the door, he awakened a shrill, petulant little bell, which, communicating with the parlour beyond, brought Mr. Pogey bouncing out upon him, like a fantoccini figure which leaps from its concealment the moment you touch the spring.

The dispensary was a small dark shop, scantily lighted, and disclosing a dusky array of bottles and jars, a narrow counter full of thin drawers with paper labels pasted on them, and a weighing machine in the shape of a tall wooden chair, standing bolt upright in one corner. The parlour behind was separated from the dispensary by a door, in the upper half of which was a window with a green curtain hanging inside. A round table

stood in the centre of the parlour. One side of the room was occupied by a range of bookshelves, slightly out of the horizontal, filled by books much broken and tattered, and apparently not very carefully arranged, some being upside down, and others scattered about in odd volumes, varied by stray gallipots and unknown surgical instruments, a fractured plaster cast of the head of Galen, some Chinese and Indian curiosities smothered up in dust, and here and there sundry mysterious particles preserved in spirits, and fragments of bones suspended on threads. A glass case on another side exhibited a couple of punch-bowls, and a hospitable supply of tumblers, interspersed with divers articles in plate and china. The room had a disorderly appearance, but was thoroughly warm and comfortable. A merry fire throwing a broad glow over the decanters and glasses that covered the table, gave it a cosy and cheerful aspect.

"Punctual!" exclaimed Pogey, inflicting on Richard a friendly thrust in the ribs; "seven to the minute. Come—deposit yourself in that easy chair. Right sort of a night for a chat by the fire—snug chair that—eh?"

"Very," returned Richard.

"Just put a hand to the table, and draw it over. Bachelors' hall, my boy—must wait upon ourselves. Nobody in the house but old Meg, and she's getting the oysters; and Pim, my assistant, and he's gone to bed with a toothache. But I know no reason why we shouldn't be comfortable for all that—do you? Now, what will you take! There's some old rum—real Jamaica—and prime Cogniac that never saw the steps of the Custom-house. What will you have?"

"I think I'll venture on a little rum," said Richard.

"Good—can't make a mistake. Try a squeeze of lemon with it. Afraid of acids? Popular error. Acids are absolutely necessary to some constitutions, and act on the biliary ducts with a surprising effect. See what a deluge of lemon juice I discharge into my tumbler, and I believe I'm tolerably free from bilious derangement. Come—there's the hot water—help yourself."

These hospitable preliminaries being concluded, Richard and his vivacious host drew close to the fire, and Pogey, throwing himself back in his chair, prepared to open the business of the evening. It was impossible for Mr. Pogey, when he had any object in view, to avoid a certain pomp of manner, which plainly announced that something was coming.

"Strange thing, Rawlings," he commenced, "that old Raggles should go off without making a will. Now, you know a good deal about his affairs—how d'ye think he'll cut up?"

"Can't even guess," returned Richard, "nobody knows less about his affairs."

"Pooh! pooh! you must be confidential with me: the widow has placed everything in my hands, and we can't get on without you. Did he never talk to you about a will?"

"Never."

"Very odd that!"

"There was no confidence between us on such subjects. He was a suspicious man, and never trusted anybody with his affairs."

"But you know all about his business transactions—eh?"

"Merely in a general way—he kept all the particulars locked up."

"Cautious old file—that explains how it is that his papers are in such a mizzle. Can't make head or tail of them; and as to the widow—poor thing, between ourselves, she was quite thrown away in that quarter—she can't illuminate us. So we must go into the thing ourselves, and see how we stand."

"I will give you all the help in my power," returned Richard.

"Mysterious man, that Raggles," said Pogey; "penurious as a rat—must have made a sight of money. What d'ye think?"

"He didn't spend much at all events."

"Spend! He lived upon cheese-parings; could make a shilling do duty for half-a-crown; must have been saving all his life, and see what it comes to. To be sure the widow will have the advantage of it—that's something. She'll know what to do with it—eh! Rawlings? Charming woman—suppose we drink her health?"

"With all my heart," replied Richard.

Pogey drank her health with a loud splutter of enthusiasm, and all the honours. "She's not the sort of woman that will remain long a widow," he resumed; "soft eye and delicate skin—sweet as a nut. Women of that kind always marry again."

"It never occurred to me," said Richard.

"Meg!" cried out Pogey at the top of his voice.

This summons had reference to a heavy tread in the passage, and was answered by a frowsy woman wrapped up in

numerous shawls, one of which was drawn over her head, and pinned close under her chin.

"Where are the oysters?"

"Below waiting your orders," replied the old woman, wheezing through the shawls, which she gathered about her mouth as she spoke.

"Below?" cried Poge; "but we want them above. Come—be alive!" and Meg moved lumberingly out, and presently returned wheezing fearfully under a tray containing a bountiful dish of oysters and their auxiliary accompaniments.

"There, that will do—now, take yourself off," and Meg took herself off, as she was desired.

The oysters were discussed with considerable animation, Mr. Poge enlightening Richard upon the natural history of shell-fish, and their action upon the fluids of the body.

"I often prescribed oysters," he observed, "for old Raggles—no—he wouldn't listen to it. He had a notion that they were too cold for the stomach—poor old pump! By the way, Rawlings, I haven't forgiven you for turning me out of the room, you remember."

"Oh! yes, I remember—but you musn't blame me, Mr. Poge—what could I do? It was his own request."

"Pish, man, you don't suppose I was hurt at it—I'm used to such things. They pass by me, as the immortal bard says, like the idle wind, which I take no notice of. It's part of my profession to be knocked about. But what had he to say to you? what was it? anything about *her*?"

"No—nothing at all. I don't think he had anything to say."

"There was something on his mind, Rawlings—I tried to get it out of him—might as well try to get gravy out of a stone—wouldn't speak to anybody but you. And after all it came to nothing—eh?"

"Why, it was nearly all over, you know, when I came in."

"Yes, but you were with him a quarter of an hour, and he had his speech plain enough when I left him. No secret, Rawlings?"

"Secret, Mr. Poge? Is it likely, of all people in the world, he would confide a secret to me?"

"Why not? It looked very like it. What did he want with you?"

"That's altogether unaccountable, for he never showed

any confidence in me, and always treated me with harshness—cruelty; but he's gone now, and I forgive him."

"Right, Rawlings. Resentments are only a waste of time; and life is so short, that we have hardly room enough to take care of ourselves, and pick up a little pleasure as we get along."

"Pleasure, Mr. Pogeys? I haven't had much of that."

"So much the better; you'll enjoy it the more when it comes. We can't have our own way at all times, and must make the most of it when we have it. Sound philosophy, I believe—eh? Look at me—see how I rub through—I'm never put out. I should like to see the difficulty that would put me out. I take the sunny side of the way; depend upon it there's always a sunny side, if we will only take the trouble to cross over. Raggles never could see it, and was groping all his life like a mole in the dark. He was just the man to have a burden on his mind—and he had—I'm sure of that."

The conversation was interrupted at this point by a sharp ring of the dispensary bell, instantly followed by an apparition that popped in at the door of a sallow face, fiercely moustached, with a mop of dark clustering hair, buried under the shadow of a large white hat.

"Engaged?" said the head.

"Ha! captain, is that you?" returned Pogeys, evidently annoyed at the interruption.

"Busy?—I'll look in again."

"Well—I *am* busy just now," said Pogeys.

"You look deucedly comfortable," said the head, thrusting itself a little farther into the room, and drawing three-fourths of its body after it. The speaker wore a frock-coat, buttoned up closely to the throat, and carried a heavy stick, which he balanced in his left hand, as he stood half-revealed in the doorway.

"We're on a little private business," cried Pogeys, "or I'd ask you to join us."

"Wouldn't break in upon you for the world, my good fellow," returned the captain; "only just popped in to see if you were alive. No smell of frost here—cuts like a razor outside. I say, Pogeys, really busy?—very particular? Couldn't take me into consultation?"

"Why, the fact is, captain, we're engaged upon a family matter."

"I wish I was one of the family," returned the captain;

"couldn't vote me a thirty-first cousin, or something of that kind?"

"Well, for half-a-minute," said Pogey, good-humouredly; "we'll admit you as family adviser, to give us your opinion upon a recipe I have been recommending to my friend here; but——"

"On honour!" said the captain, stretching over to the table, while Pogey brewed a rapid mixture of rum, brandy, and hot water, flavoured with a prodigious quantity of lemon and lump sugar; "on honour—don't be alarmed—I shan't sit down. I'll back Pogey," he continued, addressing himself to Richard, "against any man in England at an impromptu glass of punch. Take a lesson, sir, from P'ogey—he despises measures—trusts to his eye, and hits off the quantities with precision. I never knew him fail."

"How do you find it?" said Pogey.

"Perfect!" returned the captain; "confoundedly hot—all the better for that, you know, with the thermometer out of sight below freezing point. I tell you what it is, Pogey, I haven't the honour of knowing your friend's name, but he may take my word for it—*experientia docet*—that he has got into capital quarters for the night. I see you're in for it."

"My friend," observed Pogey, "is Mr. Rawlings—Captain Scott Dingle."

"Delighted to make your acquaintance, sir," cried Captain Scott Dingle, gathering his stick up under his left arm, and extending his right hand to Richard, the other being engaged in poising his glass; "devilish sorry, though, to lose it so soon—happy to improve it on the earliest opportunity."

"So you shall, captain," said Pogey.

"That's a bargain," returned the captain; "I'll hold you to that. Name your own time, and I'm your man. Nothing to do, but to devote myself to my friends. Happy to come to you any night you like—Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—when shall it be? I'll look in to-morrow as I'm taking my rounds. Oysters—you've been indulging in oysters. Do you recommend oysters to your patients, Pogey?"

"Not to you," cried Pogey; "it depends on constitution—and I should say——"

"That's enough—I see! No oysters for me. Very well, I'll have my revenge some night. Honour! I'm gone—*exit* Dingle into the snow. So, here goes—your health and good night. Take a friend's advice, and don't go into

excess. You look devilish dissipated, Pogeys—that's a fact—well—I'm gone. A rush through the ice, and home to bed like an Esquimaux. Shan't stir out of your chair; ceremony with me?—not a bit of it. Good night, Rawlings—delighted to meet you again, and as soon as you like. Good night, Pogeys, my ancient!" and, vanishing through the door, the quick tingle of the bell announced that Captain Scott Dingle had taken his departure.

"There he goes!" cried Pogeys. "Replenish your glass, Rawlings. We mustn't let Dingle spoil our evening. A hair-brained, light-hearted dog. You'd suppose, now, that he and I were old friends?"

"Certainly," returned Richard; "he seems on very intimate terms."

"Exactly so: that's his way with everybody. He'll be as intimate with you the next time he meets you. Come—I'm ahead of you—let me brew for you. I have known Dingle now somewhere about six weeks."

"Six weeks!" said Richard. "I should have guessed as many years."

"He came into my dispensary one morning, introduced himself, held me in a trance with a long rigmarole story, dropped in again in the evening, and has continued to drop in at all hours, half-a-dozen times a day, ever since. He's as much at home here as I am myself. Meg!"

The bundle of shawls heaved up slowly out of the side door.

"Shut up, Meg," said Pogeys. "And, mind, if I'm wanted, call up Pim. Be alive!"

It was as much as that heap of shawls could do to be alive; and Mr. Pogeys appeared to be perfectly aware of the fact from his frequent appeals to its vitality. When Meg was dismissed to the shades, Mr. Pogeys resumed.

"An old campaigner, that Dingle. Served in the Peninsula, came home, was put upon half-pay, and lives like an industrious bee, by succulent extracts from every chance acquaintance he happens to light upon. Dingle's a gentleman, notwithstanding. No crime to be poor; hang it! it isn't that—but he's so confoundedly familiar, that once you let him inside your house, he establishes himself as a fixture!"

"I think I have heard the name before," said Richard; "Scott Dingle?"

"No," replied Pogeys; "not likely to be much in your way. He says he belongs to an old stock—Dorsetshire, or some-

where—but the estates have gone somehow out of the family. That's always the case. No great matter, as far as he's concerned, for if he had the estate it would run through his hands like water. Rather a different sort of man from Raggles—rather!"

"*Heknew* the value of money," returned Richard; "although, Mr. Poge, it appears to me that one might make a more profitable use of money than hoarding it up."

"I agree with you, Rawlings," said Poge; "I like the sentiment. Money is necessary as a foundation; but if there was to be nothing but foundations, what should we do for houses? That's my view of it. Get the foundation first—all right—no objection to that: but when you've laid your foundation, begin to build—eh? Good sense that, I suspect? We're not to be always grubbing in the earth—must begin to live some time. Practical that—eh?"

"Progress, sir," said Richard. "We have, all of us, a right to look forward. There's no reason, I think, why a man with health and a clear head shouldn't make his way in the world."

"None whatever. Everything has a beginning. Where were your dukes and marquises two or three hundred years ago? They had their beginning, as well as you or me."

"True, Mr. Poge, true. It's a thing to think of. But then the difficulty is the beginning."

"The difficulty, Rawlings, is the first guinea. Get your first guinea, and the rest will follow, just as you put a seed in the ground, and a lusty plant grows out of it, choked up with seeds. I haven't lived for nothing. Where should I be if I hadn't watched the main chance? I'm watching it every day, and, unless I make a false move, it must come to something at last."

Mr. Poge was evidently growing very frank and communicative. Perhaps it was the liberal punch, which loosens the tongue and melts down all prudent reserve; perhaps it was that he had taken a sudden fancy to Rawlings; perhaps both. Rawlings was in a position to be serviceable to him in a certain design which was dimly shaping itself in his mind, and which, in the confidence of hospitality,—for Poge was hospitable in the most miscellaneous sense,—was prematurely betraying itself. There is nothing so dangerous to inchoate projects as a close bacchanalian *tête-à-tête*. It somehow brings them out, one cannot tell how, before their time. Men ought to wait till their projects are clearly resolved

upon, and their means fully prepared, before they take people into their confidence, and then they should proceed with cautious circumspection. Had anybody consulted Pogeys on such a point in the cool of the morning, he would have been decidedly of this opinion; but it was now waxing late into a winter's night, and Pogeys was snugly seated at home over the fire entertaining a guest, and that guest a person that might be useful to him; and so, in the fulness of his enjoyment, he ran his head against his own sober judgment.

"You were talking of Mrs. Raggles," said Pogeys; "she must administer to the property. Now what is your private opinion, Rawlings,—don't suppose I'm inquisitive,—not at all,—but I've a reason,—what is your private opinion about the property? Do you think he really left much behind?"

"I know so little about his affairs," replied Richard, "that I'm afraid, if I ventured an opinion, I should only mislead you."

"My dear Rawlings," returned Pogeys, "I don't ask what you *know*—but what you *think*. In a word—do you think he died rich?"

"Rich? Well, rich certainly. I think there can be no doubt of that."

"You think so? I'm delighted to hear it. Kind, friendly soul that Mrs. Raggles. Sweet temper!—you ought to know that, at all events."

"We heard very little of her in the house."

"Modest as a daisy, 'wee, crimson-tipped flower!' moving about like a sunbeam over the floor. That's the woman to make a man happy,—voice as low and mellow as a flute. It goes to my heart to think she should be a widow. I take a great interest in widows,—it's one of my weaknesses. There's something uncommonly attractive in a young widow,—don't know what it is—never could find out. The sensibilities of the sex seem to be awakened in a peculiar manner during their transit through that agitating interregnum. I always fancy that the second husband comes in a sort of burst of surprise upon them, making up by a wonderful provision of nature for the arrears of his predecessor. She's safe to marry again?"

"Very probable, now that you mention it. I never thought of that; it's quite a new light to me. But you know the world better than I do, Mr. Pogeys."

"Mark what I tell you, she'll marry again—and soon. If I don't mistake, Rawlings, I've got somebody in my eye for her."

"Already, Mr. Pogy?"

"Already, Mr. Pogy? Why not, Mr. Rawlings? A woman with a snug settlement at her back is safe to be picked up in no time. And such a woman as Barbara Raggles! She's a picture to look at—'grace in every step, in every gesture dignity,' and—and—the rest of it! Just imagine Barbara Raggles seated there, at the head of that table doing the honours—eh? Don't you think it would make a great difference?"

"It would be an extraordinary change for you, Mr. Pogy, if that's what you mean."

"I don't say that's what I mean—but I do say that a professional man like me ought to have a wife. I'm not in love, Rawlings—though I might have been in love over and over again. It didn't exactly suit. I don't fancy raw girls—they know nothing of the world. I like a wife ready-made to my hand—no nonsense, training, and teaching the young idea how to shoot. Haven't time for that. A widow that has served her apprenticeship, and comes to the business wide awake—that's the trump card for me. Now, there's Barbara Raggles—what a combination is there! young and rich—don't run away with the notion that I'm in love; but if I were to fall in love—I say, Rawlings, if such a thing *were* to happen—Barbara Raggles is the woman for my money!"

"It never struck me," said Richard; "Mrs. Raggles marry again!"

"Is there anything so surprising in that?"

"Oh! no—of course—I see it clearly—and you really mean, Mr. Pogy——"

"Rawlings, my boy—the fact of the matter is—another glass before you start——"

"I daren't—I feel my head a little giddy already—it isn't as well seasoned as yours, you know. But you were going to say——"

"Between ourselves—we must pull together. I am factotum there, and can do anything. You understand? I'm beginning to get tired of single blessedness. I've had enough of that sort of blessedness, and find it rather dismal. Just look at my books—survey my shelves in 'admired disorder'—I'm a great reader, when I've nothing else to do—but I don't know how it is, I never can put a book back in its right place, or find it when I want it. Then, my rum and brandy have an ugly habit of getting very low all of a sudden; and things break of

themselves ; and there's nothing where it ought to be, and everything's wrong, and in short—I have been thinking seriously that I want a wife."

"And Mrs. Raggles——"

"That depends, Rawlings. I wouldn't marry any woman for her money—but to marry without money—to work up hill, against wind and weather! It requires consideration—I tell you what it is—we must see our way a little. No harm in that. There's a good business, you know—a capital business. Suppose now, by-and-by, a certain event should happen—why, there's a chance for you, somebody must take the business—eh, Rawlings? Let us just have a peep into the property—you can manage all that—do you see daylight now?"

"Well—I think it *is* near daylight, Mr. Pogeys ; and all this is so new and strange to me, that we had better talk of it another time."

"Keep your own counsel—not a word about me!"

"You may be sure of that," replied Richard.

"It may never come to anything, you know, and one doesn't like to be talked about for nothing."

"Certainly not," replied Richard.

A few more admonitions about secrecy, and a shout of hilarious friendship from Mr. Pogeys, and they parted.

"And so," thought Richard, as he walked home through the frosty night, "and so Mr. Pogeys is laying himself out to marry Mrs. Raggles!"

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH TREATS OF LADIES.

MRS. RAGGLES administered to upwards of seven thousand pounds. Although the amount was considerably larger than Mr. Pogeys had originally anticipated, he was by no means satisfied that they had traced out the whole of the deceased's estate. This is a very common infirmity. Exorbitant desires grow upon unexpected fortune. In this case, perhaps, there was some excuse for Mr. Pogeys's unreasonableness. The seven thousand were got at by degrees, item by item, through a series of discoveries amongst scrubby memoranda, sinister scraps of paper, and ill-kept books, so that Mr. Pogeys was, to some extent, justified in supposing, or suspecting, that more discoveries might remain behind.

Respecting the management of this property, which was chiefly invested in mortgages and loans, a difference of opinion arose between Mr. Pogeys and Richard Rawlings. Mr. Pogeys was for calling it in and realising at once; Richard thought it would be imprudent to make any sudden changes, that it would look like a pressure for ready money, and shake confidence. Between her two cabinet ministers, Mrs. Raggles was grievously perplexed. She had no very clear perception of her own as to what she ought to do; and was governed, from day to day, by the opinion of the last speaker. In this state of oscillation she left things as they were, and did nothing; which was exactly what Richard Rawlings wished her to do. Recovering gently out of the first shock of her bereavement, Mrs. Raggles gradually resumed her natural spirits, and became very much like what she had been before her marriage, with the addition of a more knowledgeable display of personal attractions, and a certain air of womanly development that greatly improved her appearance. The shyness of girlhood was displaced by a dash of confidence that imparted an agreeable ambiguity to her manners, not unlikely to be mistaken on the surface for coquetry. Everybody said she looked positively fascinating in her weeds, and you could see the effect of all this homage in the pretty capriciousness that flirted in and out of her eyes, and round the corners of her mouth.

Women of every mould—the stern, the tender, the strong, the weak,—may be said, under certain conditions and limitations, to be flirts by nature; flirting is an instinct or primary law of their organisation; nor can any period of time be safely assigned when they cease to practise it, consciously or unconsciously. Our young widow was not an exception to the common law of her sex; and of all flirts, young widows are generally admitted to be the most scientific and dangerous.

Mrs. Raggles had no sooner become accustomed to her new circumstances, and begun to feel her freedom and independence, than she displayed a proficiency in the art of flirtation for which probably the reader, who has hitherto seen her only in her secondary relations with society, would hardly be disposed to give her credit. She came out marvellously strong, considering her opportunities. The first person who fell within the range of her influence was Captain Scott Dingle. But we must not anticipate the adventures of her widowhood. There are a few slight incidents to be cleared off before we come to this point.

Within a week or two after Mrs. Raggles had taken out

letters of administration, it was considered desirable that she should recruit her health by a change of scene. Mr. Pogey urgently recommended this measure. Her nerves were affected by recent anxieties, and by the gloom and depression of that stifling and dreary house in the market-place. Mr. Pogey's friendly offices on the occasion were not limited to mere advice; he took the trouble of providing a suitable residence for her in the country, some five or six miles from Yarlton, at the cottage of a lady who was a particular friend of his own, and who, on a short notice, displayed the liveliest interest in her situation. Mrs. M'Spurl was a widow, like herself, and could sympathise in her distress; and had arrived at that matronly period of life when she could, with propriety, undertake so responsible a charge. Mrs. M'Spurl was remarkably small in stature, quick and terse of speech, with a sharp Scotch accent, painfully neat in her household, and perfect mistress of the secrets of domestic economy, which appeared to constitute the principal business of her life. Her cottage stood in its own garden, through which a gravel-walk, closely boxed at each side, and buttoned up at top and bottom with vases of stone-crop, that drooped out over the edges in the same pattern, as if they had grown to order, went straight from the little gate to the door. You could see in a moment that a careful hand presided over the place. Trees were dropped exactly opposite to each other; every shrub on the left had its counterpart on the right; the door-step was as white as a cambric handkerchief; the creepers on the front of the house betrayed no vagrant luxuriance, every tendril clung close to the wall, and was nailed accurately to the very tip, so that not a solitary bud escaped into the air; and the interior was a model of precision, from the hall mat, that looked so dry and crisp, to the little dimity curtains in the attic window, that pierced the centre of the blue slates, and had as prim an aspect as if they were starched to the glass. Even in the winter-time, notwithstanding the snow which mottled the ground, Bermuda Cottage—for such it was called—had a gay and bright exterior.

It was quite a little expedition, the journey to Bermuda Cottage. A world of packing and flurry and preparation preceded the departure, and when Mrs. Raggles arrived at her destination, and found herself in a cheerful little room looking out upon the open country, a few tears started into her eyes.

"We'll try," said Mrs. M'Spurl, "if we can't make you a wee bit comfortable. The pure air will set up your speerits

again. You've had a sair trial of it ; but it's a perfect waste of the animal economy to greet o'er our troubles ; so, just set yoursel' down there, and don't fash yoursel' any mair. A cup o' strong tea will bring ye all right. Gude help us ! but ye do luik drouthy and waesome !"

Leaving Mrs. Raggles to recover her spirits under the judicious auspices of Mrs. McSpurl, we will return to Yarlton.

Agreeably to the arrangements entered into with Mr. Pogey, Richard Rawlings had undertaken the entire management of the widow's affairs, and as it was indispensably necessary that somebody should reside on the premises, he was regularly installed in the house as soon as Mrs. Raggles had taken her departure. As for the difference of opinion between him and Mr. Pogey respecting the future disposal of the property, that was merely a question of expediency which they occasionally discussed, but which never interfered with their amicable relations. The business was now substantially vested in his own hands. He threw himself actively into its details, and opening a personal communication with the various individuals, of every degree, with whom Mr. Raggles had been connected, he soon acquired a complete control over the whole of the matters entrusted to him.

A striking change had taken place in Richard Rawlings. The cloud had passed away. His handsome features brightened under his new fortunes ; and, although the natural tone of his face was that of a grave and earnest serenity, it was sometimes lighted up by an expression almost amounting to gaiety. You could see that the repose of his manner was the repose of success ; and if he never gave way to any bursts of hilarity, such as shallower men could hardly have repressed under similar circumstances, a close observer might detect beneath his reserve the quiet exultation that made sure of the present, and looked steadily into the future.

Captain Scott Dingle was an excellent judge of the externals of character in his own way. Like most men who have passed much of their time in mess-rooms and military quarters, abroad and at home, he had a certain theory of the elements that enter into the social compilation of a gentleman. They were certainly not very profound or mysterious, and did not make a very heavy demand on the mental or heroic faculties. It was with him rather a matter of taste than of observation. Personal appearance went a long way with Dingle : air, figure, manner, self-possession, and the absence of salient vul-

garities (even if it left nothing but an inoffensive blank behind) contributed largely to his ideal, and were taken in at a glance. He saw that Richard Rawlings possessed these traits in a higher degree than Mr. Pogey, although he could not see the weightier qualities that formed the substratum of his character. Pogey's geniality and eternal flutter amused Dingle, and gave a fill-up to his vacant hours; but we are afraid that the worthy apothecary's boisterous address, which thundered down upon you sometimes like an avalanche, did not exactly square with the captain's private standard. Richard had at least the advantage of a complexional seriousness, which, if it did not bring out the breeding of a gentleman, had the happy effect, in some degree, of concealing the want of it; and the captain accordingly took an extraordinary fancy to Richard, and cultivated him with assiduity. As for Dingle himself, knocking recklessly about the world as he was, his somewhat Bohemian way of life rendered him by no means particular in his choice of acquaintances; he took them all as they came, and made the most of them, as it suited his humour; but he could, nevertheless, discriminate when he liked, and always preferred the man who came nearest to his notions of a gentleman, although he was too indolent to go out of his course to seek him.

Having nothing whatever to do, he had no sooner beaten up Richard's quarters than he became a constant visitor. Richard looked upon him as the type of a class of society to which he had hitherto had no opportunities of ascending, and he encouraged him as a sort of rough study. In the confidence which grew out of this intimacy, Dingle opened his heart to Richard, whereby the latter found himself ultimately involved in rather an awkward *imbroglio*. It appeared that Mr. Pogey, relying upon the captain's superior knowledge of social tactics, and the attraction of his profession—for Mr. Pogey was of opinion, with Sir Lucius O'Trigger, that the ladies have a touch of the old serpent in them, and are caught, like vipers, with a bit of red cloth—had engaged him in his interest with the widow, and, taking him out one fine morning to Bermuda Cottage, introduced him, in form, as his particular friend. Mr. Pogey was not the person to conduct an affair of this nature with the requisite discretion; he could not keep his own counsel, and expecting to make a great hit with the widow, through the agency of Captain Scott Dingle, he revealed to that gentleman the secret of his design upon her. The immediate result of the introduction was communicated to Richard

by the captain in a moment of overflowing cordiality. Dingle considered Richard as *safe* as Pogey had considered Dingle. Richard took up much the same position between the two as the lawyer that arbitrated the famous oyster case.

We may here remark, by way of parenthesis, that men who exhibit the highest sense of honour in other affairs, sometimes commit the most flagrant breaches of trust in the affairs of love. They will sacrifice a friend in such cases with as little remorse as if the whole thing were a jest at a masquerade. Strange that women, to whom we ascribe the most refining and elevating influences, should ruin our morals in this way! Alas! alas! there is no morality in love!

"Pogey *would* wisk me off with him," said Dingle; "no great fancy to morning visits—rather out of my line latterly; but I went to oblige him. Found the widow in the garden, clipping the shrubs with a pair of scissors; and that little Scotch woman darting about like a Mayfly. You should have seen Mrs. Raggles when Pogey introduced me."

"A little frightened, I dare say," observed Richard.

"Frightened, my good fellow? I *have* seen a pretty considerable multitude of women in my time, Rawlings—brown, white, and red; but, in the inductive science of ogling a man,—phrooh!" said the captain, with a long whistle; "she beats them hollow. A woman of some breeding does the thing by degrees, throws out an inuendo from the corner of her eyes, calls it back again, and plays you like a trout. But Mrs. Raggles dips into the stream at once, and sweeps in her fish with a net."

The captain did not do justice to Mrs. Raggles. He indulged in rather a loose view of that embarrassing interview with the widow. The fact was, that when he was introduced to her by Mr. Pogey, with a cannonade of bows and flourishes, poor Mrs. Raggles was taken by surprise, and her long eyelashes dropped suddenly, and the blood bounded into her cheeks, and flushed up over her forehead. But thinking it necessary to conceal the flurry into which she was thrown by the sudden introduction of a strange gentleman, she opened her eyes again, and cast a sidelong glance upon him, which was meant for a mixture of bashfulness and easy confidence, but which unintentionally conveyed to him that dubious expression men are so apt to interpret to their own advantage. The captain quickly availed himself of the opening which his vanity fancied it detected in this innocent reception, and fol-

lowed it up with such a volley of compliments as to heighten the lady's confusion, and to compel her to adopt a variety of ways of looking at him under the milk-white round of that coquettish cap which was now brought into action for the first time, and which only inflamed the impression she had so undesignedly made upon him.

"The fact is, Rawlings," said the captain, "I'm not a marrying man—never dreamt of such a thing—but when a woman with seven thousand pounds throws herself at your head, what's a fellow to do? As for Poge—stuff and nonsense—she only laughs in her sleeve at him. I could see that clearly. I ought to know the sex tolerably—pretty extensive experience—have seen them at all ages, and in all climates. Poge has as much chance in that quarter as my bamboo. You may consider the thing settled, old fellow! Keep a sharp look out, and when I have converted the widow into Mrs. Scott Dingle, wont I treat you to an explosion!"

"So," thought Richard, when the captain had left him to meditate upon this unexpected piece of intelligence, "Captain Scott Dingle is laying himself out to marry Mrs. Raggles!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH SHOWS HOW RICHARD RAWLINGS BEGINS TO MOUNT THE LADDER.

SPRING and Summer had passed away, and Autumn was in the woods. The pleasant air, with a thought of chilliness in it, sang amongst the leaves, and turned them inside out, and sometimes in sport carried them away. With the changes of the seasons come changes in the lives of young and old. Amusements, occupations, hopes, recollections, anniversaries, undergo vicissitudes of bud, and bloom, and blight, just like trees and flowers; and equinox and solstice mark revolutions in the moral as in the physical world. The oak was shedding its foliage, and Mrs. Raggles her weeds.

She still remained at Bermuda Cottage; and during the intervening months, Mr. Poge and Captain Scott Dingle sedulously continued their visits, with such fluctuations in their suits as might be expected from the flickering caprice of a lady who did not exactly know her own mind, and who, if the truth in such matters could be got at, enjoyed vastly more the pleasure of keeping them both in a flutter of uncertainty, than of resolving the doubts of either, which

would have brought her pastime to a close. Now, if they had exhibited ordinary skill or discretion in the management of their game, it might have had a different issue; but they showed their cards too openly, and put her upon her guard too early in the play. In fact, Pogeey very soon began to suspect Dingle, and from that moment they mutually displayed the injudicious jealousy of rivals rather than the eager impetuosity of lovers, and so over-acted their parts, in the hope of out-doing each other, that their ardour seemed to be more engrossed in a contest between themselves than in a passion for the lady. Mrs. Raggles was as well aware as Dean Swift that love does not need "oaths to make it known," and that

He that most would hide his flame
Does in that case his pain reveal.

And so it happened, that when the Autumn arrived, neither the captain nor the apothecary was much nearer his object than when he started.

In the meanwhile Richard Rawlings devoted himself with assiduity to the widow's affairs. His efforts were crowned with success. His own circumstances were considerably improved, and without committing himself to any personal display, he wore the appearance of one who had acquired a responsible position. The crushed boy had risen to the stature and bearing of a man.

It was, of course, necessary for him to keep up a constant communication with Mrs. Raggles; and the contrast between his manner and that of her other visitors was very apparent to her, and, at first, not very agreeable. Reserved, quiet, and almost grave, he never attempted to flatter her foibles—he did not even seem to be conscious of them, and nearly inspired her with a belief that she possessed a respectable understanding, by always addressing her as if he believed in it himself. Pogeey and Dingle amused her, and when they made their appearance, nothing could exceed her high spirits. When Richard Rawlings came, the scene was as suddenly changed as if the curtain had been dropped on the play, and the lights put out. His serious temperament put her gaiety to silence; and, although he was younger and handsomer than either of her more lively friends, she could not bring herself to regard him in his youthful form, but only in that still and sage aspect which a woman's imagination usually

associates with more advanced years. Sometimes, on his way to the cottage, he fell in with one or other of the widow's suitors, and as neither of them considered Richard in any other light than as a useful deputy, he had the satisfaction of learning from both the progress and particulars of their wooing.

One evening, towards the close of the Autumn, Joey and Crikey Snaggs (who, between them, kept house for Richard) were sitting in the kitchen, Crikey Snaggs philosophically watching the soldiers shooting each other in the fire, and Joey rocking herself in a chair at a little distance, as if she wanted to go asleep and couldn't. Rubbing her eyes after a while, she looked thoughtfully at Crikey, apparently revolving some difficult problem in her mind, and then put the following startling question to him.

"Why did they call you Snaggs?"

"Don't know," said Crikey; "it come in turn, I suppose."

"Lord help us! do they christen of 'em like that?"

"In course they do. Who christened you?"

"I never heerd."

"Why do they call you Joey?"

"Joey aint my name."

"It aint?"

"No."

"What were it then?"

"Johanna. They call me Joey for short."

A pause; Joey still ruminating, then breaking silence with another interrogatory.

"Who were your feyther?"

"There's a go. I never had no feyther."

"Don't be a heathen, Crikey. You must have had a feyther."

"Had *you*?"

"I should say so," replied Joey, looking at Crikey with a blaze of wonderment in her eyes. "Who were your mother?"

At this question, Crikey burst out into a laugh. "Why, Joey, you *ere* a fool, you *ere*. I'm a reg'lar orphan."

"And how did you come here?"

"I was took 'prentice, in course. What a gabey you *ere*, Joey!"

Further inquiries into this obscure bar sinister were brought to a full stop by the parlour bell.

"That's Mr. Rawlings," said Joey; "go up, Crikey."

Crikey swam round slowly out of his chair, and went yawning up stairs.

"There are some parcels to be delivered, Crikey," said Richard; "and a letter for Mrs. Raggles." Crikey's chief business consisted in delivering parcels and letters.

Crikey gathered up the parcels, conned the direction of the letter, and asking for a piece of paper to fold it up in, deposited it methodically in his pocket, which he pinned at the top to make all sure.

"That's a careful lad," said Richard. "Now that I think of it, you can write, Crikey?" Crikey rubbed his head, and made no reply. "Didn't they teach you to read and write?"

"If you please, sir," said Crikey, "I can read, but have left off writing."

"You could pick it up again. Would you like to try?"

"Don't know, sir."

"I was thinking, Crikey, that you ought to have a little schooling. It would help you to do something for yourself by-and-by. Would you like to go to an evening school?"

"If you please, sir," returned Crikey.

"Well, run now as quickly as you can with the parcels. We'll talk of the school another time."

Crikey went off with his head full of this astonishing proposal. Go to school? Desks, copy-books, ink-horns, rulers, and a flock of little boys danced before his eyes all along the road. You could see by the manner he curvetted on and off the path, and spun himself like a top up and down the little hillocks by the road-side, that his equilibrium was upset. Yet the thoughts that tumultuously galloped through his brain were not altogether as joyous as the vagabond delight he exhibited would seem to imply. The conversation he had had with Joey, although it produced no effect at the moment, recurred unpleasantly to him in the midst of these riotous images. Poor Crikey, for the first time in his life, felt how de-olate it was never to have had a father or mother, and wondered how the boys would treat him when they should hear that he was a foundling. He thought also of his deformity, and shrank from the companionship of happier creatures who had straight limbs, and strong muscles, and pleasant homes. These things never troubled him before, and in the turmoil of his sensations, it would be difficult to determine whether there lay more joy or sadness at the core of poor Crikey Snaggs' heart that night.

The messenger was scarcely gone, when a loud voice broke

upon Richard's ear. "Hillo-yo-yo-yo!" cried the voice. It was Mr. Pokey, who had come in as Crikey went out, and who adopted this lusty mode of announcing himself.

"Rawlings, my boy," said Mr. Pokey, "I wanted to have two words with you—can't stay three minutes—there's a patient expecting me. I begged of her to put it off a little, but time, tide, and women will wait for no man. What a wonderful thing it is, Rawlings, to look at the population of the world, and think how much it owes to *us*. The clergy and the lawyers may cross their legs at their ease, and 'the great globe itself,' and everything in it, would go on just the same;—but if the doctors were to take a holiday for four-and-twenty hours, the whole framework of humanity would be dislocated. Sense in that, I fancy? What I wanted to say to you was this—when are you going out to see the widow?"

"To-morrow morning. I have business with her."

"Good—the sooner the better. Well, you know, I have been trying it on brisk in that quarter," said Pokey.

"So you have told me," replied Richard.

"Can't fathom her. She doubles like a hare. Can't comprehend her. Never at fault with men—see my way to my mark, and generally hit it—eh? But women! you might know a woman all your life, and you'll have to begin again before you can make her out. Anatomical riddles, sir! There's Mrs. Raggles; I have her on Monday; she twists out of the course on Tuesday; think I've caught her on Wednesday; done again on Thursday; and so she slips on and off like a sailor's knot. It tries a man's constitution, Rawlings, and keeps him in a perpetual state of alarm. Alarm? D—n it, sir, I'm beginning to forget everything;—I went out the other day without my hat, and only last week sent a dose of calomel, enough to kill a horse, to a child in the measles. What do you think of that? It wont do, Rawlings; it wont do, I tell you."

"Wouldn't it be prudent, then, to give it up?" observed Richard.

"Give it up? After all the time and trouble it has cost me? Lost three patients in one day, while I was philandering at Bermuda Cottage. Give it up? That wouldn't pay, my boy. Do I look like a man that would give it up? I'll tell you what, I'll try another dodge. Sure of her in the end; that's tolerably certain. Nobody in the field but Dingle—poor devil!—a naked, worn-out, sallow-faced half-pay; not an ounce of blood in his body;—she'd as soon set her cap at a lamp-post. Now,

Rawlings, she'll never suspect that I have said anything to you about it, and what I want you to do is to sound her ;—sound her—do it in your own way, you know, with that precious solemn face of yours. You'll discover in five minutes how the cat jumps."

"Do you really believe, Mr. Pogeey, that, if you have failed in making this discovery, I should be likely to succeed?"

"I do. She'll betray herself to you, although she's as dark as an eclipse to me. Go to work cautiously ; don't seem to know anything ; watch her face—that's it ; perhaps she'll not say much, but there are other ways of finding out people's thoughts beside what they say—ch ? I'll trust you for that."

"Well—I'll try."

"Can't stay to say any more to you now ; but I know I'm safe in your hands. Caution, my boy. Never was foiled yet, and not likely to be now. Be careful what you say about me, lest she might see through it ; but for Dingle—you can pooh ! pooh ! Dingle. That's enough for him. See you to-morrow." And off went Mr. Pogeey.

Richard Rawlings was by no means indisposed to undertake this mission. He had observed for some time that Mr. Pogeey was losing ground with Mrs. Raggles, and that Captain Scott Dingle was much in the same predicament ; and the necessity of having such an interview with the widow as Mr. Pogeey was so anxious to bring about, although not, perhaps, exactly for the same object, had already presented itself to his own mind.

Early the next morning, Richard entered the parlour of Bermuda Cottage. Mrs. Raggles was not alone. Mrs. M'Spurl was bustling about the room, settling the sofa covers and pillows, arranging and re-arranging the ornaments on the mantelpiece, very busy with a geranium-stand in the window, then back to the sofa, then back to the geranium-stand, intent, as it appeared to Richard, who did not understand household affairs, upon making work for herself, so that she might have an excuse for remaining in the room.

Richard endured this with tolerable patience at first, and talked about trifles,—Mrs. Raggles' health, the weather, the cat. These were soon exhausted. He then threw out some broad hints ; but Mrs. M'Spurl was not a person to take a hint. The more he hinted, the more occupation she contrived for herself, until, having gone the round of the room over and over again, dusting and settling, it became a matter of curious speculation what she could find to do next. It may be supposed she

had a motive for lingering so officiously. She was Pogeys' friend, and didn't like the visits of Richard Rawlings. To be sure, he was very serious and distant, but he was also handsome and young, and exercised a silent influence over Mrs. Raggles, which no ingenious efforts of Mrs. M'Spurl's in sundry private conversations could break down. She had often thought of talking to Mr. Pogeys about him, but then she was afraid of Pogeys, whose discretion she had no great reliance upon, so she resolved to watch and keep her own counsel. Richard resolved that, whatever other use she might make of her opportunities, she shouldn't watch; and, quietly interrupting her industrial operations, informed her that he had private business with Mrs. Raggles.

"Private beesiness, have ye?" said Mrs. M'Spurl; "oh! if it's beesiness—"

"Perhaps you will allow us to be alone."

Mrs. M'Spurl was very reluctant to allow any such thing; but she couldn't help herself, and accordingly making the most of it with a "vera sorry to be in onybody's way," she bustled to the door, and bustled out.

Richard Rawlings and Mrs. Raggles were alone. There are occasions in human life when people feel, although they cannot tell why, a strange sensation which is commonly indicated by the phrase that there is "something going to happen." This was exactly what Mrs. Raggles felt when Richard, after a turn or two up and down the room, took a chair opposite to her, and began to speak very slowly, and in a somewhat more solemn or premeditated tone than usual. Formerly, in the golden age, presentiments of this kind were visibly typified by untoward accidents, such as getting out of bed backwards, or putting on one's stockings with the wrong side outwards, which Mr. Foresight considered good omens; but in our age these material revelations have been displaced by omens of a different nature, such as a vague aching of the heart, slight confusion of ideas, &c. We are not enabled to say whether anything unusual had occurred to Mrs. Raggles that morning at her toilet, but there is no doubt that, at this moment, she experienced certain premonitory symptoms which plainly indicated that there was "something going to happen."

How Richard Rawlings managed to bring it round may be better imagined than described. The painter who, in despair of expressing an intense emotion, buried it under a veil, was a profound master of his art; and we will take leave to imi-

tate his excellent example. But as it is necessary to explain in what manner, and to what extent, Mrs. Raggles' presentiment was fulfilled, we must state that Richard Rawlings began by an allusion to the length of time she had been a widow, observing that she would soon be out of her widowhood, and that he thought some arrangements out to be made for the future. Starting from this point, he insensibly conducted the conversation, through many starts, and shivers, and pretty bursts of slender fright and anger on the part of Mrs. Raggles, to the topic of marriage. At first she was indignant, and paced about as royally as a queen, repulsing the bare suggestion, with a mincing and petulant toss of the head, and a true womanly assertion of those indefinite rights for which the sex is always so ready to take up arms, and so easily prevailed upon to lay them down again.

Richard preserved his composure heroically. He was at a signal disadvantage. The antecedents of his life were terribly against him; and the relation in which he stood to his fair, pampered mistress, more than once made the case look desperate. But it was the crisis of his career, and his courage was equal to it. She considered it very strange, to say the least of it, that he should talk to her on such a subject, and was thrown into such a flutter of irritation, that he ventured to deprecate her wrath by gently taking her hand, and hoping that she was not really angry with him. It would have been difficult to be angry with him at that moment. He looked too handsome for that.

Having obtained possession of her hand, which, in spite of sundry twitches, he could not be induced to relinquish, he led her to the sofa, and seating himself beside her, endeavoured to calm her agitation by a stratagem of little arguments, suggesting that he had many things to say to her which he never could summon up resolution to say before, and hoping that she would allow him to say them then. There could be no harm, at all events, in hearing what he had to say.

Mysterious are the ways of women. One never can tell how it is that they sometimes fluctuate in a breath from tears and storms into sunshine, with the fitfulness of an April day; and how, at the very height of a passion of scorn, they lapse into compliance. Assuredly it is a very happy thing for us that their sensations have such an ascendancy over their reason, and that the logic of cause and effect so rarely interferes with the gracious flexibility of their natures.

Mrs. Raggles might have been really nervous, and unable to exercise a proper control over herself at this critical juncture, or she might have felt an irresistible curiosity, which most women will regard with indulgence, to hear what he had to say; but from whatever cause it was, she did consent to let him say what he wished. We will not go into the details of that conversation, a great part of which was addressed to her hand; every individual finger being, from time to time, drawn out lovingly for separate audience. The particulars would hardly justify the formality of publication; and any reader who cannot divine the substance of them by the help of his own experience, may readily enlighten himself on the subject by inquiring of the first friend he meets.

It was late before Richard took leave of Mrs. Raggles. He left her, as may be supposed, in a state of considerable perturbation.

Some natures, being feeble, must, of necessity, cling to stronger natures. They twine round them for support like creepers round trees. Mrs. Raggles was one of these. She thought much that night of Mr. Pogeys and Captain Scott Dingle, and being brought at once to a close inspection of their characters, she felt how weak and insecure they were in comparison with Richard Rawlings. His strength, imposing in its reserve, his grave earnestness, and the power he wielded over her thoughts, feelings, and opinions, came out in palpable relief from the involuntary contrast. And, mixed with these reflections, were certain by no means disagreeable references to his personal appearance, his youth, energy, and that promise of worldly success which was brightly stamped upon his whole bearing. It was not very surprising, therefore, that Mrs. Raggles, considering that her tendrils were floating on the wind looking out for something to cling to, should have resolved to cling for life to Richard Rawlings.

About two months after the date of this interview, Mr. Pogeys was surprised one evening by a visit from Captain Scott Dingle. They had not seen much of each other lately, and their meeting opened with a little mutual shyness on both sides, which, however, soon wore off.

"Why, Pogeys, my ancient," exclaimed the captain, "how deucedly thin you've grown! Your face is drawn in like a dried raisin. 'Pon my life, seriously, though, you *are* thin. Anything wrong? Taking too much of your own physick, I suppose?"

"Not exactly," returned Poge; "we medical men don't generally indulge in luxuries of that kind—thin? A man's never so well as when he's thin. A sign of lively circulation—no weight—no oppression. Never better in my life, my boy. Can't say so much for you, though, captain. You were always a lean Cassius; but there's that peculiar yellow in your eyes that makes you look like a man just going to have a fit of the jaundice. How's your appetite?"

"You think if a man's appetite's good it's all right?"

"An infallible test."

"Then make your mind easy about me. I have got the appetite of an ostrich. Happy to establish the fact by an experiment. My good fellow, there's nothing the matter with me, depend upon it."

These last words were not uttered with the captain's usual gaiety. Lapsing for a moment into silence, he flung himself across a chair, and, stretching out his legs, began to yawn.

"I'm confoundedly tired," he resumed; "have hardly sat down all day. Walking and talking, and eternally moving about, it's astonishing what a quantity of fatigue a fellow goes through without thinking of it."

"So it is," said Poge; "but I'm used to it. I like it. It agrees with me. There's nothing like action for driving away thought and keeping up a healthy state of the system. Action and re-action—mind and body—cause and effect—irritation and counter-irritation—there's the whole philosophy of life in a nutshell."

"I don't know how it is," observed Dingle, "but when I have anything bothering me, I can't walk about. Some men are thrown into a fidget; now, I get the blue devils, and am ready to hang myself. How do you account for that?"

"Constitution—temperament. You want regular exercise—tonics. You should keep yourself calm, and, above all things, avoid mental excitement."

"Easily said, old fellow. I should like to see the *homo* that has gone through the world without mental excitement. How the devil is it to be avoided? I thought I was pretty clear of that sort of thing; but latterly I begin to get infernally moody. I suppose it's because we're getting old, Poge. The worst of it is, one doesn't know what to be at. If one had an understandable annoyance, one would know what to do; but this dismal feeling creeping all over you, that you don't know where to begin, or how to get at it—it's devilish un-

comfortable, and makes a fellow as flat as ditch-water. I'm desperately low to-night, Pogey—that's the fact."

"The truth is, captain," said Pogey, "that men at our age—we're not chickens exactly—shouldn't fish in troubled waters."

"I should like to know, just by way of curiosity, what you mean by that?" said Dingle.

Mr. Pogey began to stroke his chin with his finger and thumb. "Well, I suspect you're a little thrown out of your calculations by the widow."

"Ah! it's there you are, is it?" returned the captain; "thrown out of my calculations, am I? I should like to know how you find your own calculations?"

"Oh! pretty well, thank you," replied Pogey, with a gloomy attempt at a smile.

"Pretty well, do you? Well, I confess, I shouldn't have thought so from what the widow said to me yesterday."

"And may I ask," inquired Pogey, "what she said to you yesterday?"

"With the greatest pleasure in life," replied the captain; "she said that if there wasn't another man in the world, she wouldn't marry a fussy country practitioner, that——"

"She did, did she?" demanded Pogey. "That's curious."

"Do you think so?"

"Very, considering what she said to me only the day before."

"And pray may I inquire what she said?"

"Merely observed that she'd rather pick a husband out of the streets, blindfolded, than marry a battered half-pay, who——"

"She said that? Listen to me—this is a serious business, Pogey—no nonsense with me, you know. You're only playing off one of your absurd jokes. Don't be stupid."

"Jokes, is it? Shall I tell you anything more she said?"

"Pish! I don't care what she said. I have it from her own lips that your visits are a nuisance to her—a nuisance——"

"Ditto—ditto, captain."

"I wonder you haven't the sense to see that she was only throwing you off the scent."

"And how do you know that she wasn't doing the same thing with you—eh? There's gravel in that, captain!"

By this time they were pacing up and down, as well as the dimensions of the room would allow, in a state of high exacerbation, the captain with his arms crossed, and his bamboo sticking out behind; and Pogey with one hand plunged into

his breeches-pocket, and the other violently twirling a pestle that threatened to fly off out of the window at every jerk. While they were thus engaged, John Peabody made his appearance.

"Ha!" said John Peabody, "how lucky to meet you both together. This will save me a walk, captain. I've a note for you, and another for Mr. Poge. There—read them. What do you think of that?"

Mr. Poge slowly opened the note. Captain Scott Dingle did the same.

"Mr. Peabody," said Poge, "will you be good enough to explain to me the meaning of this?"

"Why, it's pretty plain, Mr. Poge," returned Peabody.

"Plain?" cried Dingle; "this isn't the first of April, is it?"

"Well," said John Peabody, "I really thought, now, that you'd both be so delighted."

"Delighted?" said the captain; "of course, so we are. What do you say, Poge? Delighted!—you're delighted—to be sure—of course you are! d——"

"Yours is the same, I suppose?" inquired Poge.

"The identical same," returned the captain.

"And so, Mr. Peabody," said Mr. Poge, "Mr. Rawlings—Mr. Richard Rawlings—is going to be married to Mrs. Raggles?"

"On Wednesday morning," replied John Peabody; "isn't it a glorious bit of luck?"

"Luck!" repeated Dingle, with an expression of infinite disgust.

"I wish him joy of her, that's all!" said Poge.

"I knew you would," said John Peabody.

"So do I!" exclaimed the captain, fiercely.

"Come—that's as it ought to be," remarked John Peabody.

The notes were notes of invitation. Remembering all the trouble Mr. Poge had taken in Mrs. Raggles' affairs, and the numerous polite attentions of Captain Scott Dingle, Richard Rawlings thought he could not do less than request their presence at the wedding.

"Your hand, Poge," said Dingle, "if I have said anything—"

"Not a word," returned Poge; "will you go?"

"Go?" reiterated the captain; then, turning a look of thunder upon John Peabody, he exclaimed, putting on his hat at the same time, and crushing it down with a slap of his hand, "Good night, Mr. Peabody!" and rushed out. Mr. Poge

at the same instant darted out of the other door. John Peabody walked home in a condition of profound bewilderment.

Mr. Pogeys was very much enraged at first; but, after a little cool reflection, he compromised his mortification on professional grounds, and, turning off his disappointment with a philosophical laugh, he made himself extremely sociable and merry on the occasion. The captain took the matter with more dignity. He considered himself jilted. But then it occurred to him that Mrs. Raggles was a woman, and that women will sometimes, in the face of sun, moon, and stars, jilt the most eligible men for their inferiors; that his case was by no means an uncommon one, and that he should only look foolish if he betrayed any annoyance at it. And so, consoling himself, like a man of the world, who took its rubs with habitual *nonchalance*, he, too, went to the wedding, as if nothing had happened, and did himself the honour of proposing the bride's health in a glass of punch, which Pogeys insisted upon brewing after dinner especially for that purpose.

BOOK THE SECOND.

IF THE LION'S SKIN CAN'T, THE FOX'S SHALL.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH A HASTY JOURNEY IS BEGUN AND ENDED.

It is the practice of eminent historians to dwell at great length upon the more eventful, or, as the case may be, the more accessible, periods of history, and to pass briefly over the less important. Thus Dr. Smollett treats a single reign so elaborately, that it will be found to occupy more room than Mr. Hume devoted to two, or three, or half a dozen kings. Following this illustrious example, we propose to distribute our pages conscientiously according to the relative magnitude of the various matters with which we have to deal, and to condense the next few years of our narrative into the smallest possible compass, because they contain no events about which the reader would care to be more particularly informed.

It was not till after Richard Rawlings was actually married to Mrs. Raggles, that he remembered the curious story related to him by the undertaker on the morning of the funeral, about the glove with the ring in it. That he should have selected that very glove to attend the burial of Mr. Raggles, and that he should have afterwards married Mr. Raggles' widow, was certainly curious enough. We do not pretend to explain how it happened; but many things happen which cannot be explained, and most people are in the habit of doing a great many things which they cannot explain themselves. Richard, however, had forgotten all about the story, and would, probably, never have remembered it, if he had not met the undertaker one day in the street, and been reminded of it by that individual, who, addressing himself to Richard, in a deferential tone of voice, which contrasted remarkably with the smirking manner of his former communication, observed,

"I told you, Mr. Rawlings, it was very odd about that 'ere ring in the glove, and now it's all out. I look upon it, sir, as a miraculous coincidence."

When the attention of Richard Rawlings was thus called to the point, he, also, considered it a coincidence. And, if a coincidence, it was undoubtedly a lucky one, for from the hour of his marriage prosperity came fast and thick upon him.

They had been married scarcely a month when a letter arrived from France, announcing the death of that apocryphal uncle who had settled at Tours, and who, being what Nurse Waters called a "bachelour," had left the whole of his property to his niece, the only relative he was supposed to have in the world. Upon the receipt of this intelligence, Richard Rawlings resolved to take a journey to the Continent, and to carry his wife along with him. The proposition was received with joy by the lady. It was the first great holiday in her life. She had never been out of England—hardly ever out of Yarlton—knew no more of France or the French than of Otaheite or the Otaheitans,—and in the innocence of her heart, exaggerating the perils and terrors of that delightfully-alarming expedition into an unknown land, devoted a whole month, night and day, to the laborious task of preparation. Richard good-naturedly yielded to her wishes for this exorbitant delay, because he could not make his own arrangements in a shorter period.

At last all the preliminaries were completed for their departure. There was a wonderful number of bandboxes, trunks,

valises, and bags; and when the Eclipse coach arrived at the door to take them up on their journey to London, the coachman looked terribly disconcerted at the heap of luggage which was piled up in front of the house, and which he was expected to find room for on the roof. The packing and strapping, intermingled with surly variations upon all the popular forms of malediction, made a woful delay, nor was it finished until numerous experiments and failures in the building up of one article upon another had exhausted the patience of the guards and porters. At last the huge pyramid was accomplished and covered over with a tarpaulin; and while the coach was swinging to and fro with its superincumbent weight, and threatening to topple over at each new disturbance of its perilous balance, Mrs. Rawlings, having her foot on the step, suddenly recollected that she had forgotten something, and rushed back into the house. Once more half into the coach, and out again for something else. The coachman was one of the old school, and, proud of his integrity on the point of time, was not to be trifled with. Snatching up his reins violently, he swore with a loud oath that he would be off without her. This menace brought her to a sense of what was due to the Eclipse, and she sprang in with a sort of scattering velocity, the coach starting at the same instant, with such a shock as to fling her into the lap of a quiet old gentleman who was muffled up in the corner. Unluckily, at this awkward crisis, she bethought herself of another indispensable article, and, there being no time to move out of the gentleman's lap, she kept her position, and grasping the window with both hands, she thrust out her head, and cried aloud to Mrs. Peabody and her husband, who were left in charge of the house, and who stood making their adieus! at the door, "My basket! my basket! I can't go without my basket. Stop! stop!" But while she was uttering these urgent exclamations, the horses were off at a gallop, and Mrs. Rawlings was obliged to set out upon that long journey without her basket.

In a condition of undisguised despair she flounced into the opposite seat, and the old gentleman, relieved of a deposit that had seriously shocked and alarmed him, re-adjusted his disordered mufflings, and tucking his coats and cloaks over his legs and under his knees, and drawing his comforter up round his ears and across his mouth, settled himself again in his corner. There was nothing visible of him except his eyes, which he kept constantly half-closed, as if he was listening with

them. Mrs. Rawlings talked incessantly at first about the incalculable inconvenience she should suffer from the want of her basket, which contained creature comforts and other necessities; then she rattled away about London, making it clear that she had never been there before; and then made an excursion into France, with an exuberance which her husband was occasionally forced to check. During all this time the old gentleman, although frequently courted by palpable innuendoes and indirect hints, rarely spoke, and when he did, it was in curt and dry monosyllables. Mrs. Rawlings thought him the most savage little brute she had ever met.

It was night when they arrived in London. The first peep into the metropolis is no ordinary event in one's life, and Mrs. Rawlings had her own sensations and opinions on the subject. She was, of course, bewildered by the vast number of streets, the crowds, the din, the uproar; but as the idea of immensity is slowly taken in by the imagination, which is always more forcibly struck by isolated objects, it must be confessed Mrs. Rawlings was, upon the whole, disappointed. Her route, unfortunately, lay through a ragged part of the City, where there was nothing to be seen but a great concourse of people, mixed up in a stunning hurly-burly, which gave her a very distinct ache in her head, without making any distinct impression on her mind. Such was the chaos, unrelieved by a solitary specimen of the kind of fantastical grandeur or magnificence she expected, that, by the time she found herself in a dim and very dirty old inn in Gracechurch-street, she had come to an uneasy conclusion that London was an extremely disagreeable and uncomfortable place. Nobody took the least notice of her, they even pushed by her roughly as she was making her way up the clammy stairs; everybody was occupied with his own business; and the tumult of voices, and cracking of whips, and rolling in and out of wheels, the vile odours, the slamming of doors, and the rush of porters in the dusky passages with great bales of luggage, effectually destroyed the ideal she had formed of town life. Her disappointment and mortification were increased by the placidity with which Richard carried himself through the riot. To him it was the outward sign and palpitating pulse of the great heart of commerce; and, while she was thinking only of present vexations, his thoughts were absorbed in the contemplation of future acquisitions.

During the single day they remained in town, Mrs. Raw-

lings' feelings underwent no modification ; on the contrary, she had reason to think worse and worse of the place. Pent up in a dingy little room that looked out, over a tottering wooden balcony, upon a horrid court filled with coaches, waggons, and ostlers, she passed a wretched morning all alone, while Richard was making the necessary arrangements to continue their journey to Dover. She could scarcely persuade herself that it really was London ; and when evening came at last, and they were boxed up in a stage-coach once more, she was heartily rejoiced to get out of the loathsome den.

A journey to Paris, in those days, was a formidable enterprise for people who travelled by diligence, and did not know a word of French. Richard Rawlings, however, abbreviated the embarrassments by pushing on as fast as he could, and had no sooner landed at Calais than he booked himself direct through to the capital. It was necessary to wait till the next day, and they put up at Roberts' hotel, which appeared to Mrs. Rawlings infinitely more agreeable than the nasty inn in Gracechurch-street. There was a pleasant open court, lined with boxes of aloes and evergreens ; festoons of leaves dropped into the windows of the *salle à manger*, and the whole place was so gay and bright, that Mrs. Rawlings was fairly enchanted. She thought France must be the most charming country in the world. All the people seemed to be amusing themselves, and perpetually singing and taking off their hats. Their vivacity and politeness threw her into the highest spirits. She felt like a child for the first time at a pantomime, and might be said to do nothing but mentally clap her little hands and crow with delight. Every moment she was in and out of the *salle à manger*, examining the strange costumes, and listening to the chatter of the mercurial ladies and gentlemen who flew about the house like birds. Towards night everybody gathered in to supper, and the agitation and novelty of the scene put Mrs. Rawlings into so alarming a state of ecstasy, that she talked ahead like a person bewildered.

In the midst of her hilarity, she all at once observed that a small elderly man, who sat opposite to her, was watching her closely. She thought she knew the face, but could not recollect where she had seen it. Yet it was by no means familiar to her. She recognised the eyes, but that was all. Of the thin wiry mouth, and the brown wig, curled all over the

top, and cropped close to the ears, she had no recollection whatever. Her curiosity was provoked, and, in her perplexity, she turned to Richard.

"Haven't we seen that gentleman somewhere before?" she inquired.

"To be sure," returned Richard; "don't you remember? He travelled with us up to London."

"So it is, I declare," said Mrs. Rawlings; "how very odd."

It was the dumb little old gentleman of the stage-coach, who, relieved of his numerous coats and muffings, could hardly be identified except by his sharp eyes, which, through their quick and expressive motions, seemed to do the office of speech for him. The discovery shattered Mrs. Rawlings' elastic spirits. She had conceived a strong aversion to that cynical-looking individual, and, feeling that his critical gaze was fixed upon her, she relapsed into silence. The old gentleman, as if he were conscious that he had spoiled her enjoyment, appeared disposed to make amends for it, and quietly opened a conversation with Richard.

"You are going to Paris?" he inquired.

"Yes," replied Richard.

"So am I," returned the old gentleman.

"We go by the eight o'clock diligence," observed Richard.

"So do I," said the old gentleman.

"Indeed!"

"As we are likely to be many hours together, we ought to make the time pass as pleasantly as we can," resumed the little man; "will the lady do me the honour to take a glass of wine with me?"

Mrs. Rawlings blushed scarlet. The development of such geniality on the part of the glum stranger, took her as much back as if the gleam of a dark lantern had been suddenly hot upon her. The conversation now became less reserved, and the elderly gentleman began to display much interest in Richard Rawlings' future movements.

"Do you make any stay in Paris?" he inquired.

"Oh! no," said Richard; "we only pass through. I am pressed in time, and must get back as quickly as I can."

"You are going into the interior?"

"To Tours."

"Long journey that from Paris."

Richard thought these inquiries rather officious, and for the rest of the evening kept clear of any further revelations.

But the old gentleman showed so much friendliness, that he grew rapidly upon the good opinion of his new acquaintances. He was well informed about France, and gave Richard some very useful hints. And so they parted for the night, all formality having melted down into one of those warm impromptu confidences which travellers sometimes form over a supper at the end of a day's journey.

The next morning, in the diligence, the old gentleman renewed the conversation with unabated frankness. Being a good Frenchman, and familiar with the road, he was able to be of essential service to them, and made the time pass so agreeably, that Mrs. Rawlings declared she did not know what they should have done without him. She was at the top of her florid spirits, and, whenever Mrs. Rawlings was in that state of excitement, there was no end to her communicativeness. She talked so much and so fast upon this occasion, that, long before they reached Paris, she had put the little old man in complete possession of every particular connected with their expedition, where they were going, and why they were going, and what they intended to do when they got home again.

Richard, in vain, endeavoured to put a stop to this flood of gossip. But it must be remembered that he was not very long married, and that the fortune his wife had brought him gave her at first an ascendancy in her own right, which, looking back upon his recent position, could not be combated all at once.

At length they found themselves in an hotel in Paris, where the travelling intimacy that had sprung up between them was cemented over a miscellaneous supper and a bottle of Lafitte. The old gentleman, being now thoroughly acquainted with Mr. Rawlings' affairs, volunteered in the most off-hand and cordial manner to give him some practical advice.

"I know these people well, Mr. Rawlings," said the old gentleman; "a Frenchman is the prince of humbugs. You mustn't be taken in by their professions. Their politeness is only skin-deep. They'll cheat you with one hand, while they're hugging you with the other. I know them well. Now tell me; you're going to take up this property at Tours. How does it stand? Money, land, goods? What is it like? I don't ask from idle curiosity. I have too much business of my own to be curious about other people's; but you don't know the country, or the language, and you'll be swindled as sure

as you've a head on your shoulders, if you don't set about this transaction cautiously."

"What you say is quite true," said Richard; "I am perfectly aware that I am to some extent at the mercy of others; but I don't intend exactly to take their word for everything. I mean to see into it myself."

"Just so," returned the old gentleman; "see into it yourself; but how can you see into what you don't understand? Excuse me; I think I can do you a service, but it can't be done unless I show you your real position. You can't speak a word of French; you are ignorant, I presume, of the law of this country. Now even I, who am tolerably well acquainted with both, should find myself put to some difficulty in your case. Have you an agent at Tours?"

"I have a letter to a Mons. Lavigne."

"A Frenchman? Let me offer you a little valuable advice. Put your letter in the fire. I will give you an introduction to an Englishman there—a correspondent of my own—he will see to the whole thing for you, and save you time and money for a trifling commission."

"Is he a lawyer?"

"No; a general agent, active, intelligent, and well acquainted with the country. You will place confidence in my recommendation when I tell you that I am a lawyer myself, and have employed Mr. Sloake on two or three occasions, and found him a capital man of business." Here the little old gentleman took out a large pocket-book, and drawing a card from it, threw it across the table to Richard.

"That's my card, Mr. Rawlings. It will be introduction enough to Mr. Sloake; but I will give you a letter to him in the morning to ensure his attention. You can consult him, at all events, and judge for yourself."

This was precisely what Richard had made up his mind to do. Frank and friendly as the old man was, Richard Rawlings intended to judge for himself of the character and capabilities of Mr. Sloake. The card presented the following address:—

MR. TOM CHIPPENDALE,

67 A, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"I shall certainly avail myself of your introduction," said Richard, "with thanks. And if Mr. Sloake and I shouldn't come upon terms, you know, there will be no harm done, Mr. Chippendale."

"Just so; and I am greatly mistaken if it don't turn out well. You are in safe hands, Mr. Rawlings. You don't know me; but everybody in London knows Tom Chippendale. I have been seven-and-thirty years in the profession, and no man with any brains in his head can have had his hands full of law all that time without knowing something of the world."

Mr. Tom Chippendale by no means exaggerated his title to such knowledge of mankind as can be acquired by long and sharp practice in the law. He knew the seamy side of the world as well as most men. He was one of the underling, working agents of the old Tory party, and a subtle hand at electioneering politics. He justly enjoyed the reputation of being one of the keenest men in a profession which affords the most favourable opportunities for the exercise of a low sagacity, and which seldom rewards as they deserve its honourable and honest members. By the indefatigable exercise of his special talents, he had accumulated a handsome fortune, and was at the top of the tree in his particular line. An extensive intercourse with all classes had educated his natural shrewdness in the quick perception of character, and few men knew how to turn that detective faculty to greater advantage. Like most persons of his stamp, he had two sets of manners—the one to freeze and repulse, the other to conciliate and cajole. He was obviously applying the latter, and more agreeable of the two, to his new friends. His obliging proposal having been thankfully accepted, he supplied Richard the next morning with the promised letter of introduction; and before they separated, it was agreed that Richard, on his return to London, should communicate to Mr. Tom Chippendale the result of his expedition.

The diligence to Tours was a very different sort of vehicle from that in which they traversed the high road to Paris. Mrs. Rawlings declared that she never was so awfully squeezed in her life, and what with the heat, the pressure, the dust coming up in clouds from the floor, and the jolting over the old paved roads, she privately expressed some apprehensions to her husband which, we are happy to say, were not destined to be realised. She fortunately experienced no further inconvenience than was effectually relieved by a day's rest at the *Hôtel la Boule d'Or*.

Mrs. Rawlings made many original observations on the state of society in France, as disclosed to her on the road-sides, and in the several hotels where they breakfasted, dined, and

slept. She was under a strong conviction that, throughout the whole of this journey, she had never got anything to eat; that the disguised dishes were composed of cats, rats, and dogs; she thought that the postillions, who produced such thundering noises with their whips, very much resembled certain bandits she had seen somewhere upon the stage; and of the weird women who waited in the inns and pattered about the country in wooden shoes she entertained dreadful suspicions. She particularly objected to everything that differed from the ways and customs she had been used to, and, in short, might be said to have disliked France, chiefly because it wasn't England. Had she possessed any literary ambition, which, we regret to say, was not the case, she could have written a striking book about France and the French.

The first business to which Mr. Rawlings addressed himself on arriving in Tours, was to make out Mr. Sloake. He found him buried in a small dusky office in the Rue St. Martin, under the shadow of the towers of the old Cathedral, which seemed to condemn the spot to an eternal twilight. The inner part of the little office was shut off by a low partition, with a tall railing on the top of it, and at a desk behind this partition sat a gaunt man, with a very bald head, wearing a large pair of green spectacles, and a pen behind his ear.

"Is Mr. Sloake at home?" inquired Richard.

"*Oui, monsieur*," returned the bald man, slowly lifting up his spectacles, and staring hard at Richard.

"Are you Mr. Sloake?"

"*Oui, oui*," replied the other.

"I have a letter for you from Mr. Tom Chippendale, of London," said Richard.

"Ha, Monsieur Chippendale. Thank you, sare."

Richard examines the person of Mr. Sloake, while that individual is reading the letter.

"Very good, very good. What must I have to do for you?"

"You are an agent, I believe?"

"*Oui, monsieur*."

"Well, I want to obtain some property left to me by a friend who died here lately, partly in securities, partly in goods. Do you ever do any business in that way?"

"Oh! *certainement*—yes.—Everything is in my way."

"Is there any difficulty about it?"

"*Difficulté*? Oh!—no—no—no! It is very easy—no

difficulté. Just give me your papers, and I will go to the *notaire*, and——”

“Thank you,” said Richard; “but, suppose we go to the *notaire* together.”

“Oh! *certainement*,—yes—we will go together. Eugene! Go together—certainly,—Eugene!—there is no *difficulté*,—*vite, vite*, Eugene!”

During these exclamations Mr. Sloake was mounting his stool with wonderful celerity for a man of such an awkward cast of body, to reach down a casquette that hung from a wooden peg on the wall. Having succeeded at last, after two or three efforts, and a little hard breathing, he descended, and placing the casquette on his head, the top of which it barely covered in the manner of a skull-cap, and buttoning up his large rough coat, he said, “I am ready—we will go together certainly—Eugene!” and strode into the street.

Richard was much struck by the promptitude and simplicity with which business appeared to be transacted in France, if this was to be taken as a sample of it, so very different from the tedious delays and formalities of England; but he was still more struck by the singular personal appearance of Mr. Sloake. That individual was tall and what is called cross-built, his great shoulders being square, his chest narrow, and his legs forming an amiable junction at the knees. He wore huge loose trousers, with a sort of military stripe down the sides, and a pair of clumsy boots, which, like his trousers, were splashed all over with mud. The outline of his body was concealed under a long pilot-coat, and round his thick, short throat was wound a narrow black handkerchief, so narrow that it looked almost like a ribbon. His face, which derived a peculiar expression from the green spectacles, was large and of a mahogany-colour, deeply pitted, and marked with heavy curved lines round the mouth. The termination of this figure in a great head with a speckled skull-cap on the summit of it, having a few grisly hairs starting out round its edges, was irresistibly ludicrous. Richard had never seen such a man before, and, from the strangeness of his dress and aspect, serious doubts arose in his mind as to whether he was an Englishman. He began, indeed, to suspect that Mr. Tom Chippendale had introduced him to a swindler. Acting upon this impression, he watched vigilantly every movement of Mr. Sloake, especially in the conversation with the notary, but could not detect the slight-

est trace of shuffle or evasion. On the contrary, Mr. Sloake appeared to be perfectly transparent in his dealings, humble and moderate in his expectations, and, instead of endeavouring, as Richard apprehended, to get the business into his own hands, he consulted Richard all throughout, and proceeded implicitly under his instructions. As to the "trifling commission" Mr. Tom Chippendale had spoken of, Mr. Sloake's views were so modest, that when the affair was finally settled, and the whole of the property obtained, Richard Rawlings found himself bound to make a voluntary addition to the small *honorarium* agreed upon. For this purpose, and in order to enhance the compliment, he invited him, the day before he left Tours, to dine with him at the *table d'hôte* of La Boule D'Or.

The *table d'hôte* was the only feature of French life that possessed an unfailing charm for Mrs. Rawlings. She delighted in the *table d'hôte*, the people were all so lively and talkative, and there was such incessant variety and clatter. The table happened to be unusually crowded on the day when Mr. Sloake came to dine with the Rawlingses, but having secured three places near the landlady, who presided, they were able to enjoy the confusion without being incommoded by it. There was not much alteration in Mr. Sloake's costume. He had substituted a long black coat, with vast side pockets, for the rough pilot-coat, but there was still the narrow strip of black handkerchief and the green spectacles, so that sitting at table he was much the same man as when he was sitting at his desk. He was evidently not used to festivals of this description, and seemed to labour under an access of lumbering *mauvaise honte*, that would not allow him to come close to the table, but kept him constantly moving his chair farther and farther back, as if he thought it more respectful and unpretending to sit at a little distance. A few glasses of wine helped him to a little courage, but he drank them so hesitatingly that the effect was desultory, and showed itself only in broken gleams.

The guests were as motley as they were numerous. There was a fine lady, who was said to be a Russian princess, with a little boy, perched up on cushions drinking champagne; several men in uniforms, with fierce moustaches, who flung their swords and caps upon a side-table as they came in; others in *blouses*; here and there a few dressed in the height of the showy French taste, with brilliant French waistcoats, chains, pins, and rings; and scattered amongst the company

were some seven or eight English, who could be distinguished at once by their pallid faces, and the repose of their costume and manners.

There was a terrible clamour during dinner, especially in the article of plates, of which the waiters were perpetually carrying into the room piles nearly as tall as themselves. Towards the dessert the riot gradually subsided, and presently most of the guests glided out of their seats, one after another, and withdrew. A few individuals lingered behind. They were evidently English. The Rawlingses, by this dispersion of the company, had their own end of the table all to themselves.

"We may now enjoy half an hour after the fashion of our own country, Mr. Sloake," said Richard; "here is a fresh bottle of wine. By-the-by, I can hardly persuade myself that you are an Englishman, do you know? I have often thought of asking you."

"Oh!—yes, certainly," replied Mr. Sloake; "I am *Anglais*,—I am native of England,—yes, certainly."

"But you have lived a long time out of the country?"

"Yes—yes—I have never live there."

"Never? How is that?"

"Why, I was born at London," said Mr. Sloake; "but when I was four, five year, I came to live at France. My father died and left me to myself, and I have never been at England since."

"But do you consider yourself an Englishmen?"

"Oh!—yes, certainly," rejoined Mr. Sloake; "my heart is English—I love English—I would fight for English,—*certainement*, I would spend my last blood at England,—yes, I am *Anglais*."

"How is it, then, that you have lived all your life here?"

"Ah! you shall know,—I am buried here,—yes, Mr. Rawling, I must die here."

"Die here?"

"Ah! it is true; I can die nowhere else. My Eugenie lies in the old cathedral. It is all that is left to me in this wide world, to go there every day, once, twice, three times, and say my prayer for Eugenie. England is never for me no more."

"Eugenie?" exclaimed Mrs. Rawlings; "what a pretty name!"

"Yes, *madame*," said Mr. Sloake, "she was my dear wife. I was then very gay and proud, but I am broken up and down now. She is dead these seven year, and I would die too, but

for my little Eugene. She lives still for me in him, *pauvre petit !*"

"A sad story, Mr. Sloake," observed Richard.

"I must live for Eugene—*voilà tout !* I have my *affaires*—not much now—*n'importe* ; a little makes for Eugene and me. We are only two in this world—only two ! But when I open my windows I see the cathedral, and I am happy. And my dear child go with me to pray, and we are both happy. No—no—I cannot never go to my country. I am in my grave with Eugenie !"

Richard Rawlings felt how much he had mistaken the real nature of this strange man ; but the mistake was natural, and he made ample amends for it. Poor Mr. Sloake was overwhelmed with gratitude at Richard's munificence in adding a few Napoleons to his bill of charges, and the next morning, early as it was in the grey dawn when the diligence started for Paris, the first person he met in the archway of the *messagerie* was Mr. Sloake, who came with a little basket of fruit and cakes, which he begged them to accept for their journey.

As the diligence turned out of the *messagerie*, there stood Mr. Sloake gazing after them, and when it reached the bridge, they could see him slowly moving away in the direction of the cathedral.

CHAPTER II.

WHICH IS DEDICATED TO LITTLE CHILDREN.

UPON his return to London, Richard Rawlings fulfilled his promise to Mr. Tom Chippendale, and called upon him in Lincoln's Inn-fields. He found him in the occupation of two floors, the lower filled with clerks, the upper, communicating by a private, sinuous staircase with the rooms below, devoted to the *sanctum* of the rich lawyer. Richard Rawlings was accommodated with a chair and the *Times* newspaper. But while he affected to ponder over the columns of the Thunderer, he was really occupied in scanning the faces and speculating on the pursuits of a group of persons who, like himself, were waiting to be admitted to an audience. His attention was particularly attracted by a tall, thin, and, apparently, very young man, recklessly, but fashionably dressed, who exhibited the utmost indignation at being detained, demanding over and over again whether his card had been sent up, and whether

Mr. Chippendale was not yet at liberty. His impatience was so violent that he was obliged to have recourse to a variety of desperate fidgets to keep his hands employed, and, by repeated operations with his cane upon the corner of the mantelpiece, he finally succeeded in chipping off a rich old moulding of grapes, much to the entertainment of a saturnine man, who sat huddled up in a corner. At last, a dismal clerk, in seedy black, came softly to Richard Rawlings, and whispering in his ear, "Mr. Chippendale will see *you*, sir," led the way up the stairs as quietly as if he had been shod with felt. Richard was to understand from this intimation that Mr. Chippendale was conferring a particular favour upon him in seeing him at the end of three-quarters of an hour. As he ascended the stairs, he felt the eyes of the fashionable young man flashing fire upon him, and heard his sharp voice in high quarrel with the clerks.

Mr. Chippendale's *sanctum* was small and dreary. Some tin cases, with the names of clients painted upon them, were scattered about, and the shelves round the walls were choked with law books, and papers tied up in separate parcels, and duly labelled. In other respects the room was mean and bare—one of those London dens in which the potent Spirits of the Law work their dire enchantments.

The lawyer was buried in a high-backed chair, deeply absorbed over a pile of documents, when Richard came in, and, without raising his head, he said, in a low, abstracted voice, "Just take a seat, Mr. Rawlings—I'll speak to you presently."

Richard was again consigned to silence, gravely impressed with the importance of Mr. Chippendale's occupations. After a pause of three or four minutes, Mr. Chippendale rose briskly from his chair, and, clearing off the cloud of business under which he had been obscured, advanced gaily to Richard, and, with both hands, gave him a hearty welcome.

"Delighted to see my fellow-traveller again!" he exclaimed; "how is madame? and how went the business at Tours?"

Richard related the whole affair, and expressed his obligations to Mr. Chippendale for the services of Mr. Sloake.

"I told you," said Mr. Chippendale, "he was the right sort of person for what you wanted. Well, now you have got your money, I suppose you want to invest. I can help you there. Whatever you do, don't let your money lie idle."

"I had been thinking of something of that kind," observed Richard, "and meant to consult you about it."

"Just so: you could not have done better. I have a dozen clients ready to make any sacrifice for a little ready money. Men of rank, most of them, with estates or good expectations. Some are sound—others rotten—and interest ranges in proportion to the risk. How much can you command? It's no use to go for small sums—I can do nothing with them."

"If I could see my way," said Richard, "I might be able to get at five or six thousand."

"You *shall* see your way—depend upon me for that. It wouldn't answer my purpose, Mr. Rawlings, to suffer my clients to make bad investments. There are secrets in all crafts. It is my interest to protect men who have money to lend. Their security is mine. Five or six thousand? We can do something with that. There is a young fellow waiting for me at this moment below—a sprig of nobility—who wants exactly five thousand, to be done through a *post obit*. But I don't intend to see him to-day. He's desperately hunted for cash, and the only way to manage such cases is by a little judicious suspense. I am not satisfied about the security, and not likely to be until he comes into my terms. Can you get at the money at once?"

"Within a few days," returned Richard.

"Should you want to call it in at a short notice?"

"I should prefer having the power to do so," replied Richard.

"Prudent, but not always practicable," said Mr. Chippendale, looking at his watch. "Bless my soul! it's three o'clock, and I have an appointment at half-past in Curzon-street. You see, the way these things are effected seldom leaves us the option of revoking the loan, except at stated times. The security is contingent upon a reversion or an income, and the money is wanted to meet immediate difficulties. It would be of no use to the borrower if he were subject to be called upon for it suddenly. In fact, in nine cases out of ten, he couldn't return it. He is already over head and ears, and the more money he borrows, the more he wants, and so it goes on, as long as the security will bear the drag upon it; and by the time he comes into his property, he generally finds it pretty nearly swallowed up. It is then the lender comes in, and redeems his capital."

"And what rate of interest, Mr. Chippendale," inquired Richard, "may be usually obtained in this way?"

"You might as well ask me on what day a Chancery suit is likely to be decided," replied the lawyer; "everything depends upon circumstances—the urgency of the case, the nature of the security. All this requires a knowledge of individuals and their position, Mr. Rawlings, in which I think I may say, without vanity, I have had a pretty extensive experience. I *have* got forty, fifty per cent.; but I don't advise that sort of thing. It's not wholesome, and forces us, sometimes, into contested actions, which make an ugly figure in the courts. Better keep on the safe side. If you look for such exorbitant returns I can be of very little use to you. There are plenty of low attorneys in London, Mr. Rawlings,—low attorneys—only, mind what you're about, that's all."

"Your advice is excellent," said Richard, slowly; "I am not at all inclined to run any desperate risks; and, if you think you can find an investment that would suit me——"

"We shall see," rejoined Mr. Chippendale; "which way are you going? Take a cast westward with me; it will give us ten minutes more. Time, time, Mr. Rawlings, is more precious than gold in London."

There was a cab at the door, and Mr. Chippendale, shooting down the front staircase, and thereby evading the visitors who were still waiting for him in the office, carried off Rawlings with him on his way to Curzon-street. During the drive, he entered into the particulars of several investments, in addition to that of the young sprig of nobility, from which a swinging interest might be derived. With Mr. Tom Chippendale such affairs were evidently matters of every-day occurrence; he talked of tens of thousands with a facility that showed how accustomed he was to transactions of that kind; and Richard Rawlings resolved to give serious consideration to his proposals.

Upon his return to Yarlton, Richard opened a correspondence with the lawyer, and, in the course of a few months, was enabled, through the agency of that skilful individual, to lay out a considerable portion of his resources at a large profit.

This was a better speculation than Noah's ark; it also suited his views better. He was endowed with that calculating instinct by which stray genius, here and there, has risen from indigence to the possession of commanding influence on the marts of Europe. The first taste of this gold-breeding experience is like the taste of blood; it makes men fierce and insatiable in the pursuit of more.

The shop and its slow, small gains, became a thing of secondary interest; and within the ensuing year Richard Rawlings sold the goodwill of the establishment to embark in undertakings that opened a wider field to his ambition.

Great changes took place in this eventful year. The old house in the market-place was exchanged for a suburban mansion, with a well-stocked garden and grounds; and Mrs. Rawlings presented her husband with a daughter. John Peabody, through the increasing influence of his patron, as Mr. Rawlings might now be regarded, had obtained an appointment in a mercantile establishment, which, if it did not quite put Mrs. Peabody at her ease, had, at least, the effect of supplying her with a different class of domestic grievances. Crikey Snaggs and Joey were still on the staff in Mr. Rawlings' household, the former much improved by a diligent course of schooling, and the latter expanding into a grown woman, with a considerable accession of roses in her comely cheeks.

A first child is always a marvel. There never was such a child as the first-born of Mrs. Rawlings. Great differences of opinion prevailed as to whom it resembled; but everybody agreed that it was a beauty.

There was much discussion upon the name that was to be given to this fascinating infant; and after many debates, the child was christened Clara. It was a compromise between some very romantic names furnished by Mrs. Rawlings (that of Eugenie being particularly pressed upon consideration), and some more homely ones proposed by papa. That point being at length finally arranged, active preparations were set on foot in the nursery department; a maid was specially provided to wait upon the young lady, who threw out early indications that she would require more than ordinary attendance. Her energy was as remarkable as her beauty; and during the first twelve months of her life, she gave such proofs of an indomitable spirit, sustained by prodigious power of lungs, as rendered the nursery-maid's situation by no means a sinecure. The only person in the house who really delighted in the child's stentorian performances was Joey. Even mamma's nerves were sometimes affected by them; but Joey never appeared to think that the child could cry loud enough, or that it should be thwarted in the innocent pleasure it derived from sundry impossible desires it occasionally manifested. On such occasions, however, the cradled darling was appeased, without

much difficulty, by the murmurs of that nonsense-talk which women esteem to be the vernacular of infancy, and in which Mrs. Rawlings was remarkably fluent.

Philosophic reader! if you could have hidden yourself in a corner of that nursery in the twilight of a long summer's evening, when Mrs. Rawlings happened to be left alone with her child, you would have been let into some surprising mysteries of this unknown tongue. Perhaps it is hardly fair to pick up these entangled skeins of affectionate babble, and to describe them as nonsense-talk. It is evidently not nonsense in the ears of the infant, who seems to comprehend it thoroughly, and to respond to it with ecstasy. How else should it impart such pleasure to the miniature creature, who replies to it with loving caresses and outcries of gladness? There is wisdom, surely, in this prattle, which has a use so sweet and appeasing in its strange, broken utterances, and varied intonations. All honour then to the chatter of mothers and nurses, which stills so many little pangs, and inspires so many little joys!

But we must hasten forward with our story, for the time yet lies far in advance of us when the human interest that is to gather round these people, at present only emerging from obscurity into the great world of passion and ambition, shall come to be developed.

Clara was two years old when Mrs. Rawlings was on the eve of announcing another addition to the family. Mr. Rawlings ardently desired a son. He had his own ideal of a son—steady, practical, intelligent; a youth to command confidence and admiration on all sides, moulded closely after himself, minted in feature and temperament from the same die. The picture was constantly before him during this interesting period. *L'homme propose, Dieu dispose!* Mrs. Rawlings unhappily, and in a very cruel manner (for her imagination was all the time running upon a daughter as a companion for little Clara), disappointed these anxious hopes.

Richard was reconciled, however, to the disappointment, by that salutary reflection which comes to the timely aid of all men in similar cases,—namely, that there was no help for it. The new comer, as far as its character could be ascertained on so short an acquaintance, contributed its own share to the reasons which prevailed upon him to submit to a contingency he could not avert. It was a singularly placid infant; by no means as handsome as its sister, but it balanced that de-

fiency by so sensitive and amiable a disposition, that everybody fell in love with it on the very first interview. Such was the tranquillity of its aspect, the softness of its eyes, and the mildness with which it conducted itself in company, that people the least accessible to such emotions, or the least skilled in the merits of that initial stage of existence, could not avoid being touched by it with a feeling of interest.

It is a happy thing for mankind that the interest thus inspired by the infant suffers no check from a knowledge of the future. How fatally this knowledge would, in some instances, turn the sunshine into darkness, and change the love that watches hopefully over the cradle into bitterness and sorrow! Most mercifully is this knowledge shut out from us! Let us then hope the best for this fair child, whose gentleness, even in the bud, awakens so much sympathy and attachment.

From the beginning, Mrs. Rawlings betrayed an excessive sensibility towards Clara, and, although she conscientiously believed that she loved them both equally, it was evident that little Margaret, the second daughter, did not cost her half the anxiety bestowed upon her sister. As the children grew up, the distinction between them became more and more apparent; not that Mrs. Rawlings neglected the one for the other, but that she yielded good-naturedly, and from the docility and easiness of her character, to the more exacting demands of the imperious Clara. In fact, Margaret gave her mamma very little trouble, and got on so well without putting other people out of the way, that she required but a slight share of that attention which the indomitable vivacity of her sister nearly monopolized.

These peculiarities in particular, and the characters of children in general, supplied a topic of frequent conversation with Mrs. Rawlings when her friends, the Peabodys, visited her. One summer's evening, they were seated under the trees talking, as was their wont, upon these matters. Mrs. Rawlings described, with sundry illustrations, the high spirits of Clara, and the thoughtful temperament of Margaret.

"I often fancy," she said, "that Margaret has a wonderful little old head of her own. I never knew such a child for thinking. She will look at you for five minutes together, without once taking her eyes off you. I wonder what in the world she can be thinking about."

"Thinking!" exclaimed Mrs. Peabody; "bless you, she's

not thinking ; it's only dreaming, as all children do, especially if they're weakly. You must be careful of that child, ma'am. She isn't strong."

"Nonsense," interposed John Peabody. "She'll grow out of that. Surprising what children can bear. Why, big as we are, Mrs. Rawlings, we never could stand the measles, and the hooping-cough, and the worms, and the knocks and sprains, and the Lord knows what, that children go through. And see how they get out of it, and grow up into men and women. When I was a child, they didn't expect me to live six months ; but I did, though ; and look at me now—I don't think there's much amiss with me. Hope for the best—who knows what may turn up for Miss Margaret yet!"

"You!" observed Mrs. Peabody, with a downward curve of her mouth ; "you, indeed ! as if you were an example. Poor John takes the world so easy that trouble runs over him like water over a duck's back."

"It's no use, you know, my dear," said John, in a tone of transcendent good humour, "for both of us to fret. I leave that to you. You like it—I don't, and never could see the good of it."

This little matrimonial episode was brought to a full stop by the approach of Richard Rawlings from the house. He looked flushed and disturbed.

"Something wrong," suggested Mrs. Peabody to Mrs. Rawlings.

"Don't notice it," returned Mrs. Rawlings, with a significant gesture.

Richard, after a mechanical question about the children, turned to John Peabody—"Any news to-day, John?"

"Not a syllable," returned John.

"That's strange, and you in a mercantile house," observed, Richard. "Have you heard nothing about Sarkens, Brothers?"

"Not I," replied John ; "no misfortune, I hope?"

"The distress in the agricultural districts," said Richard. gloomily, "affects all the banks more or less ; and, although money never was more plenty, or interest lower, nobody is safe."

John looked a little bewildered, wondering how this ominous remark could apply to Sarkens, Brothers, the principal bankers of Yarlton, who were supposed to be as secure as the Bank of England.

"But what of Sarkens, Brothers?" he inquired. "You have nothing to do with them?"

"I?—no!—no."

"All right," said John, drawing a deep breath, "so long as you're safe."

"There's a sensible observation," whispered Mrs. Peabody to Mrs. Rawlings; "that's just the man all over."

"Let me have a word with you," said Richard, drawing John off, and entering into a close conversation with him at a distance.

Mrs. Peabody, already disconcerted by Mrs. Rawlings' discouraging manner, was not in a humour to indulge Mr. Rawlings in a private conference with her husband, from which she was to be excluded. So, by way of revenge, she took a sudden leave, and on the way home endeavoured to extract from John the subject of Mr. Rawlings' confidence. But to no effect. John was impenetrable.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH WE GET A GLIMPSE OF HIGH LIFE.

THE confidential mission entrusted to John Peabody by Richard Rawlings was to ascertain whether any reports were abroad in the town affecting the credit of the bank of Sarkens, Brothers. John executed the delicate inquiry with tact and discretion, and was enabled to report that, as yet, not a breath to the prejudice of the house had reached Yarlton.

The first post on the next morning brought the following letter from London:—

(Private and confidential.)

67 A, Lincoln's Inn Fields, 15th July, 1830.

DEAR SIR,—

Yesterday's information may be depended upon. They are tottering. Immediate sum wanted from us, 20,000*l*. The rest to be got in other quarters, if we move first, which we must do to secure the first lien on the deeds. I will release the whole of your investments, and provide the difference, *but the loan must be ostensibly advanced by you*. I must not appear as a principal.

Lord Valteline will be with you almost as soon as this letter, on the part of his father, the Earl of Dragonfelt. Give the young gentleman rope enough. Let him have his bluster out. We are expected to put up with the insolence of these

people. We can afford it, for that's all they can get out of us. He'll tell you that I promised to do the business on easier terms—but *you have nothing to do with that*. Keep cool, and you'll get your price. They *must* have the money, and can't get it anywhere else. Start all the objections you can think of. *You know if you have to sell out, and call in money at a heavy loss to serve them, you must be indemnified*. The cash is ready the moment the instrument is completed.

Enclosed is a form of agreement (A) preparatory to a deed. Also, a private agreement (B) which you must sign and return to me. Get Lord Valteline's signature witnessed. Two witnesses will be better than one, as, with their local influence, we cannot reckon upon any of the Yarlton people. Such things have happened as witnesses being bought up, and sent out of the way. Get somebody you can depend upon as a second witness, to make sure. Write by return without fail.

Yours truly,

TOM CHIPPENDALE.

Richard Rawlings, Esq.

N.B.—Lord Valteline was of age last week, so he can't throw us over on the minority plea.

After a careful perusal, twice over, of this letter, Mr. Rawlings summoned Crikey Snaggs into the library. While Richard is writing a note, we may observe that Crikey is much improved in appearance since we last saw him. He is not much grown, and never will grow any more; but his face has acquired a composed and matured expression; the painful rigour of the features has almost vanished; and a staid suit of black helps, in a slight degree, to carry off the unsightly outline of his deformity.

"Take this note," said Mr. Rawlings, "to Captain Scott Dingle immediately. If he's out, you must follow him and find him, and give it into his own hands."

"Yes, sir."

"Stay a moment. I have visitors coming to dinner to-day. Attend to what I say to you. Few people would have kept you, Crikey, and had you taught, and brought up as I have done."

Crikey's blood mounted to his face at this allusion to his forlorn situation. He felt very grateful, but did not know how to say so.

"I know you are zealous."

"I'm sure on't, sir," said Crikey, brightening up.

"You must also be discreet. Do exactly what I tell you, and don't chatter about any business I employ you in; that's all. To-night, after dinner, I will call for pen and ink; wait with it in your hand behind my chair, and you will see a gentleman sign a paper: observe his signature, so that you will know it again. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; let me see that you do this carefully. Now go at once with the letter."

Crikey, highly elated by this mark of his master's confidence, had hardly left the room, when Lord Valteline's card was put into Mr. Rawlings' hands.

Before we introduce this young nobleman to the reader, it will be necessary to trace some of the circumstances connected with the business which brought him to Yarlton.

For this purpose we must revert to the spring of 1826. After a year of delusive prosperity, there came a fearful relapse. The bubbles of 1825 had burst. The whole population were suddenly reduced to despair from a state of hilarious exultation. It was necessary to put a stop by some means to the expansive system of credit which had disorganised the commercial world, and carried dismay into the tranquil nooks of private life. The issue of paper money was restricted. The remedy turned out as bad as the disease, and produced a universal crash. Bank after bank stopped payment. Merchants, traders, and people who had laid up their little savings in tempting investments, for the sake of a slight advance upon the ordinary rate of interest, were swept into the common ruin. The incidents which, during the crisis, filled up the domestic history of England, through every cranny of the kingdom, were full of terror and suspense. Wherever you went, you met the same evidences of anxiety—the agitation with which the daily newspaper was looked forward to; the whispering fear with which each new disaster was communicated from partner to partner, from husband to wife, from father to son; the wild commotion on the Exchange; the chaos in the market-place, where men looked into each other's faces with distrust, and separated without buying or selling; the solitary watch of women, as they waited, with shattered nerves, for the tidings that might in a single hour hurl down their children from affluence to beggary; the grouping of young people round the winter's fire, listening to stories of

the panic out of doors with wilder fascination than they had once listened to weird legends, when their gay hearts were touched only by imaginary terrors.

The house of Sarkens, Brothers, had stood its ground pretty well through the early part of the panic. But the crush came upon them at last, and in their emergency they applied to the Earl of Dragonfelt, whose large property in the neighbourhood gave him a preponderating county interest, and the complete command of the borough, which he wielded through their agency. He was closely identified with the house, had heavy deposits in their hands, which they no longer possessed the power to restore, and would be seriously damaged by their failure. These considerations, involving to a considerable extent the maintenance of his political position, left him no alternative but to accede to their proposals. The Bank of England had refused their paper, and thrown them suddenly on the realisation of their own resources. This required time, and the run for gold admitted of no delay. The firm possessed valuable estates, but the attempt to turn them into cash would have amounted to confiscation. The only means of escape that presented itself was to obtain a loan from a London house, on the security of mortgages on certain freeholds of his lordship's. Such was the unavoidable haste with which this measure was planned and executed, that in the eagerness to protect his lordship by something in the shape of a counter-security, he became so entangled in the affairs of the bank as to render himself liable, in the opinion of the highest legal authorities, at any future time to be brought in as a partner.

During the four years which elapsed between the date of this arrangement and the visit of Lord Valteline to Richard Rawlings, many efforts had been made to extricate the earl, but in vain. And now the bank was, a second time, on the verge of ruin, and his lordship, with the additional fear before his eyes of being implicated to an indefinite extent in the failure, was, a second time, called upon to come to the rescue.

His lordship responded to the call very grudgingly; but there was no help for it. He had no alternative; unless he preferred bankruptcy, and the surrender of Yarlton to the Whigs. He had nursed the borough for his son, who was now just of age, and ready to enter upon his parliamentary responsibility, with such qualifications as could be cultivated through a diligent career of profligate dissipation. The strug-

gles of the Liberal party to effect a general reform in the representation gave increased value, also, at this juncture, to every shred of political power that yet remained in the grasp of the Tory magnates.

Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, the present member for Yarlton, was merely the warming-pan for Lord Valteline. He was prepared to accept the Chiltern Hundreds, to turn his coat, or eat it, or do anything else that might be required of him to oblige the Dragonfelt family.

The project at present on foot for redeeming the affairs of the bank, and rescuing the earl from impending difficulties, was the negotiation of a loan, in which Lord Valteline was to join. This loan had been proposed in the first instance by the earl alone; but Mr. Tom Chippendale contrived to linger over the papers until Lord Valteline had passed his majority, and then declared that it was impossible to effect the business unless that young gentleman joined his father in the security. These conditions were considered harsh and stringent; but time pressed, and in the last extremity the basis of the arrangement was assented to, and Lord Valteline was handed over to Richard Rawlings, as the person by whom the advance was either to be made or obtained.

When Lord Valteline made his appearance in the library, Richard Rawlings instantly recognised the "sprig of nobility" whose impatience had formerly attracted his notice in the office in Lincoln's Inn-fields. He had the same *blasé* air, was dressed with the same fashionable negligence, and exhibited the languid and insipid aspect of one who had forestalled his constitution, and exhausted all the sensual sources of enjoyment by premature indulgences. He was accompanied by a remarkably small, slight gentleman, whose rapid motions and scintillating glances, suggested at once the image of a fire-fly. This little gentleman wore a short summer over-coat, and high-heeled boots, carried a dapper, silver-headed riding-whip in his hand, and, as he entered, seemed to penetrate every corner of the apartment with a fierce and scrutinising look. His features were sharply cut and minute, his hair was jet black, his upper lip was embellished with an angry moustache, which he perpetually curled between his finger and thumb, and his dark sinister eyes flashed and gleamed out like two naked swords. It was evident that Lord Valteline's friend stood upon extraordinary terms with himself, that he had a touch of the spit-fire in him, and that he had come down

"special" to "watch the proceedings," and see that his lordship wasn't "humbugged."

"You're Mr. Rawlings, I suppose," said Lord Valteline, flinging himself indolently into a chair.

Richard bowed.

"I have brought my friend, Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, with me," continued his lordship, "the member for the borough. He knows a devilish deal more about this business than I do—and—I say, Ragstaffe, will you talk to him—I'm regularly done up;" whereupon his lordship stretched himself out at full length, and began to yawn.

The difficulty was to get Mr. Ragstaffe to stand still. He had already penetrated every corner of the room, explored the book-shelves, and taken a survey of the grounds out of the window. Upon being summoned by his lordship, he took up a position at last, and, fixing himself opposite to Mr. Rawlings, darted his eyes upon him as if he would run him through.

"You know the object of our visit?" said Mr. Ragstaffe; "let us understand each other. Before we go into any particulars, we must be satisfied that we are on safe grounds." This prefatory remark was wound up with a short cough, Mr. Ragstaffe turning his head at the same moment, and exchanging a knowing wink with Lord Valteline.

"The lender is usually the party that must be satisfied in that respect, sir," replied Richard Rawlings.

"Satisfied? Come, that's cool," cried Mr. Ragstaffe, "with such a client as the Earl of Dragonfelt in your books. I should like to know if you ever did business with a man of his rank before?"

"In matters of business," returned Richard, "we have nothing to do with a man's rank."

"Oh, of course not!" cried Mr. Ragstaffe, imitating, or mocking, the tone of Richard's voice, "of course not, nor with a man's fortune neither, I suppose. If you knew me, you'd drop all that sort of humbug. I could tell you some stories of affairs I have been engaged in, that would show you whether I'm a likely person to be taken in. It won't pay, Mr. Rawlings. The gentleman must get up remarkably early in the morning that's to do me. Eh! Valteline?"

"In the middle of the night, my buck!" said Lord Valteline.

"Before we stir an inch farther," resumed Mr. Ragstaffe, "we must first be satisfied that the money is ready."

"The amount is large," said Richard, "and heavy sacrifices must be made to get it."

"That's all a hum," returned Mr. Ragstaffe; "what are your sacrifices to us? If it wasn't worth your while, you'd be very likely to lend us money—wouldn't you? Bah! I'm up to that kind of thing. It's no use to try to palm off such cant upon me. Is it, Valteline?"

"I should say not, decidedly," lisped Lord Valteline.

"Lord Valteline, I understand, proposes to become joint-security with the earl," said Richard. "Is that so?"

"D—n it!" exclaimed Lord Valteline, "don't be so infernally precise. Of course, I do. Come now, get on. Ragstaffe, will you talk to him, or we shall be here all day."

"Now, then," said Mr. Ragstaffe, "you see his lordship is willing to join in the security. What more do you want?"

"It will be necessary," said Richard, "that we should have absolute power of sale, and that title-deeds to cover the mortgage should be deposited in our hands."

Mr. Ragstaffe glowed over like a hot coal at this announcement.

"What the devil does he mean?" inquired Lord Valteline.

"Mean?" exclaimed Mr. Ragstaffe, "that we're a couple of flats—that's all."

"Chippendale never said anything about title-deeds," observed his lordship.

"Of course he didn't," cried Mr. Ragstaffe, in a paroxysm of fury, prancing up and down the room. "It's a trick—a trick." Then, stopping short, and vehemently striking his boot with the riding-whip, as if he were whetting it, preparatory to an experiment upon the shoulders of Richard Rawlings, he demanded—"Have you anything more to say?"

"Nothing more," quietly responded Richard; "the rest is mere matter of form."

"Then I have only to observe that we are not the men to submit to an imposition. Shall I tell you my opinion of you, Mr. Rawlings?" cried out Mr. Ragstaffe, kindling up into a flame, and tossing his arms about like the wings of a windmill. "I don't care that for any man; and I tell you that, in my opinion, you have brought us down here to——"

Richard Rawlings slowly raised his head, and looked the speaker full in the face. Mr. Ragstaffe gulped the remainder of the sentence with an inarticulate oath.

"Very well, gentlemen," said Richard, shutting up the papers; "there is an end to the business."

"Holloa! I say, that won't do, old fellow," cried Lord Valteline, "talk to him, Ragstaffe; d—n it! you know we mustn't be thrown out in this way."

"Perhaps his lordship is not in a hurry for the money," said Richard; "and if he can wait and look about him, I dare say he may get it on his own terms."

"Wait!" exclaimed his lordship; "but I can't wait. Devil take it, Ragstaffe! you know we must have the money at once."

"If you're so green as to give up the title-deeds," said Mr. Ragstaffe.

"Pshaw! let him have 'em. What does it matter. All the same a hundred years hence. I say, Rawlings, if we sign now, when can we touch the cash?"

"To-morrow," replied Richard. "I am to understand, then, that you agree to the terms?"

"Oh! certainly; d—n the terms! One is always obliged to agree to them. Never found it otherwise yet. Where's the infernal document?"

"It will be ready for signature in the evening," said Richard.

"The devil!" exclaimed Lord Valteline; "and we are to be kept here five or six hours longer. By what excruciating process can we contrive, Ragstaffe, to get through the time? There isn't such a thing as a billiard-table in this sink of a place, is there?"

"I had in some measure anticipated the inconvenience, my lord," said Richard; "and if your lordship and Mr. Ragstaffe will do me the honour to dine with me, we will do the best we can to entertain you."

"Dine with you?" responded his lordship; "by Jove! that's not so bad an idea. What do you say, Ragstaffe? Do you think we can manage it? D—n it! let us dine with him. It will be something new, that."

"It *will* be something new, as you say," cried Mr. Ragstaffe; "devilish new. Let us take our revenge out of his claret."

This was the only prospect of revenge that was left to Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, and he glittered over with a full sense of it. Accordingly, in anticipation of what he and Lord Valteline called "a prime lark," they took their leave till dinner-time.

Mrs. Rawlings was thrown into a delicious flutter at the

prospect of entertaining a lord and a member of Parliament at dinner. Between the toilet and the *cuisine*, the remainder of the day was passed in a terrible bustle. The servants were at their wits' end up and down the stairs, and bells were ringing and voices screaming from the scullery to the garret throughout the whole of that anxious interval.

There was but one guest more—Captain Scott Dingle. Mrs. Rawlings ventured to remark that it would be a party of five, and odd numbers were unlucky. Couldn't they get a sixth somewhere, just to make it even? But this proposition was firmly rejected by her husband. He wanted Dingle to witness his lordship's signature, and, knowing that Dingle was not to be calculated upon during the day time, when he was always taking his "rounds," and that he could make sure of him at dinner on the shortest notice, he hit upon the expedient of detaining his lordship for the purpose of securing his own witness.

The Captain arrived first. He was in high feather. When he learned that he was to meet Lord Valteline and Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, his animal spirits went up like a cork shot out of a champagne bottle. Mr. Rawlings was careful not to tell him what he wanted him for; firstly, because he had no great reliance upon his discretion, and knew that he would incontinently betray his object by some inadvertency; and secondly, because, by paying him the compliment of an invitation on his own account on such an occasion, he calculated upon making the most of his social talents. In fact, Dingle was the best man in the range of his acquaintance for the purpose. Although a little worn and crushed by time, and divers experiences of life, he had the air of a gentleman, and had mixed with gentlemen, and knew how to adapt himself and his pleasantries to the atmosphere of high life, especially on the confines where it is mixed up with some of the deleterious gases of promiscuous intercourse. He was happily cut out by taste and circumstances to shine at the point of contact between the exclusive circle of the aristocracy and the vagabondage of the outer world.

It must be acknowledged, honestly, that the captain was what is called a "loose fish." But the loose fishes are not always the worst fishes. There is a great difference, however, in the species. Lord Valteline and his friend were remarkably loose fish; but it would be an unpardonable injustice to the captain to institute any comparison between them.

In due time, his lordship and Mr. Ragstaffe made their appearance, apologising, in a half-bantering tone, for their morning costume. His lordship took in Mrs. Rawlings to dinner, and won her heart by expressing his astonishment that she should bury herself in the country instead of coming to live in London. This led to a conversation about London, which lasted through half the dinner, Mrs. Rawlings being very free in her comments on Gracechurch-street; and the high-bred guests drawing her out into innocent criticisms, at which they laughed heartily, to her great delight. She had no notion that people of their rank could be so pleasant and familiar. She had always looked upon the aristocracy as a piece of grand brocade, very stiff and solemn, and standing up petrified all over with gems and jewels; and the lively ways of these gentlemen, who eat, and drank, and talked, with such a relish, came upon her with a double charm. At first, she was a little reserved, but then they were so open and humorous, and became all at once so very intimate with her, that the distance rapidly vanished between them, and you would have thought, before dinner was ended, that they had been acquainted all their lives.

"What did you say was the name of the hotel you put up at?" inquired Lord Valteline.

"Oh! I'm sure I can't remember the name of the horrid place," replied Mrs. Rawlings.

"What a pity you didn't find your way to the neighbourhood of Covent Garden," said Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, with a sly glance at Lord Valteline; "there are some capital houses in that quarter."

"I wish you could recommend us to one of them," said Mrs. Rawlings, "in case we should go to London again, you know."

"To be sure," cried Ragstaffe; "there's the Bear, in Bow street, a highly respectable establishment. Wouldn't you recommend Mrs. Rawlings to try the Bear, Valteline?"

"Most certainly," said his lordship.

"The Bear in Bow street," repeated Mrs. Rawlings; "don't forget that, Richard. We will go there the next time." Whereat the London gentlemen burst out into a roar of laughter, in which Mrs. Rawlings heartily joined, both of them challenging her at the same time to a glass of wine.

The company were next entertained with many amusing anecdotes related by Mr. Ragstaffe of his own personal ex-

ploits; how he had once jumped out of his cab, and horse-whipped a coalheaver who wouldn't get out of his way; how, on another occasion, he disguised himself as a countryman, and hounded a dozen farmers at the Grigley election, so that they couldn't come up to the poll; how he carried a suit in Chancery by going over to France after an important witness, and bringing him back *vi et armis*, under the authority of a pretended warrant from the Secretary of State, which he had drawn up with his own hand; and many more stories of a like kind, in which his ingenuity and intrepidity appeared in the most daring and colossal forms. No man was so deep in the mysteries of metropolitan life, or had seen so much of its intrigues and rogueries; and, if his own account of himself might be credited, he was a match for any lawyer, dog-stealer, horse-jockey, or hell-keeper in the kingdom, couldn't be beaten at billiards or *ecarté*, was foremost in every political movement of his party in the House of Commons, and familiar with the scandalous chronicle of every woman of note about town. In short, Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe was a man of perpetual motion and universal genius.

Captain Scott Dingle made sundry attempts to shine at every glimpse of an opening in the shrill egotism of Mr. Ragstaffe; but Ragstaffe bore him down by the sheer force of perpetual bluster. He had the field to himself. Lord Valteline merely echoed his libertine aphorisms, and attested the veracity of his statements. Upon all such points Lord Valteline was his disciple, as Mr. Ragstaffe was the sycophant and hero-worshipper of Lord Valteline whenever his lordship's position and patronage came into play. They reflected and sustained each other admirably, and had been so accustomed to run in couples, that it may be doubted whether either of them could have done his work without the help of the other.

At length Mrs. Rawlings withdrew, fairly dazzled by the necromantic world of London adventures Mr. Ragstaffe had unveiled to her; and the gentlemen were left to themselves.

"Charming person, that," exclaimed Lord Valteline; "no flattery, Rawlings, but you're a devilish lucky fellow."

"Suppose we drink her health?" exclaimed Ragstaffe.

"With all my heart," rejoined his lordship; "Mrs. Rawlings! with a hip! hip! hurrah! and away she goes!"

The toast was drunk upstanding, with a riotous clatter of glasses, followed by a terrible thumping on the table, in

which the captain vigorously assisted. On went the rattle, Captain Dingle managing adroitly, as the wine circulated, to show off a little erudition on his favourite subject of vine-tages, which entangled him in a discussion with Mr. Ragstaffe, who, up to everything in the world, and a little more, astonished the captain with some new facts, quite unknown in the Peninsula, the country of the grape, where Dingle had picked up his information. While they were engaged in this absorbing debate, animated by incessant practical appeals to the flavour at issue between them, Richard Rawlings thought it a good opportunity to draw Lord Valteline's attention to the agreement.

"Perhaps," said he, "your lordship would like to look at the form of agreement we were speaking of."

"You don't expect me to read all that stuff now," cried his lordship. "Can't you enlighten me about it, without asking me to read?"

"Well, it is simply a note of the conditions on both sides—just as I stated them to you before dinner; and when your lordship has signed it, a deed will be drawn up from it, which will complete the transaction.

"What the devil! must we wait for the infernal lawyers before we get the money?"

"By no means," replied Richard; "this instrument is sufficient for the present, and as we have already procured the earl's assent in another form, your lordship, after signing this paper, can receive the money in full to-morrow."

"And no mistake?" demanded his lordship.

"I will give you an order for it at once on Mr. Chippendale."

"You're a trump, Rawlings," exclaimed the young nobleman; "here's your health, old fellow—and your wife's health—and all the little Rawlingses. I'm to have an order on Chippendale, am I? I'll take the liberty of stopping toll out of it before it's booked for my venerated father. But stay a minute—I say, Ragstaffe, just run your eye over this paper, will you? This is the thing we were talking of this morning—hem! Beg your pardon," he continued, addressing the captain; "a little private business—you don't mind, do you? You're a devilish good-natured looking fellow, and I'll have a glass of wine with you, special. What are you drinking?"

His lordship wheeling round to the captain, who, by this time, was ready to reciprocate any act of familiarity that

might be bestowed upon him, engaged that valiant roysterer in a grand hiccuping bumper, dedicated to affairs in general; whilst Mr. Ragstaffe, darting into a chair next to Richard Rawlings, made a violent show of acuteness, with bated breath and fierce gesticulations, in the dissection of the agreement. But as Richard Rawlings refused to admit a single alteration, all opposition was given up, and Ragstaffe, taking credit to himself for having ascertained the fact, whispered his lordship that it was all right, and that nothing remained to be done but the act manual.

The bell was rung and the ink ordered. Crikey Snaggs, who had waited for this solemn moment in a state of indescribable suspense, appeared with the necessary materials, and taking up his station behind his master's chair, planted his eyes full upon Lord Valteline. There was legibly written in those fixed orbs the consciousness of the grave responsibility he had undertaken, magnified to a height of comical terror by finding himself standing at the elbow of a lord. To Crikey Snaggs, this was altogether the most wonderful scene he had ever beheld. He was fairly beside himself with curiosity to witness the process, and when Lord Valteline signed his name with a prodigious splash that covered half the sheet, poor Crikey couldn't help bursting out into a sort of hysterical exclamation of astonishment. Richard instantly desired him to leave the room. Crikey thought that he must have, somehow, failed to carry out his instructions, and was very miserable about it; but he never forgot that immortal splash upon the paper.

"Captain Dingle," said Richard, "can witness your lordship's signature.

Mr. Ragstaffe demurred, wanted to sign it himself, but was overruled on the ground of his political connexion with the family; and Dingle, ignorant of the nature of the instrument, and hoping it wasn't a bill stamp, wrote his name at full length with an elaborate tail of flourishes improvised in honour of the occasion. In consideration thereof, the captain proposed a bishop, which, being uproariously seconded, was accordingly put into forward preparation, Mr. Ragstaffe, who knew how to do everything better than anybody else, taking the manufacture of it into his own hands, and, by way of showing off his accomplishments in the art, calling for certain ingredients which had never before been known to enter into its composition. We are sorry we cannot supply

our readers with Mr. Ragstaffe's compound receipt for a bishop; but probably they will not consider it an irreparable loss when we add that, after a protracted indulgence in the delectable mixture, Lord Valteline announced his determination to walk home to London, unluckily stumbling over a chair in the attempt; and that Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, who stood to his gun with extraordinary valour at the beginning, fell fast asleep with his head on the table, and was obliged to be carried out to a postchaise, which had waited upwards of three hours at the door for Mr. Rawlings' London visitors.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH TIME ADVANCES FASTER THAN THE STORY.

YEARS rolled on, and Richard Rawlings was slowly but perseveringly achieving the great aim of his life. The progress from want to wealth seems like an Oriental fable, in which, at the bidding of a magician, palaces of gold are made to spring up in barren places, and inexhaustible riches are conjured out of rocks and caverns. Yet of all material facts in an age of commercial enterprise, and in such a country as England, this is in reality the least surprising. Men who regard money as a means to an end, seeking in other sources the true satisfaction of life, seldom grow rich. They resemble the watermen who are pithily described, in an old London comedy, as rowing one way and looking another. But men who regard money as the end itself, seldom fail. Opportunities descend upon the former like rain upon the succulent earth, into which it sinks and vanishes. The latter put out vessels and collect every drop. His early experiences supplied Richard Rawlings with a sufficient incentive to activity. He owed the world nothing but a long reckoning of bitter memories. The hardships, humiliations, and struggles of his youth were ever present to him in his career of prosperity, shaping his actions, and hardening his resolution. And now that he was acquiring the taste of power and independence, his desire of revenge upon the pride, tyranny, and meanness from which he had suffered, assumed something of the grandeur of an overruling passion. Ambition was setting in upon his heart, and turning it to stone. It is strange, but not

more strange than true, that men who have risen up out of oppression, often become oppressors themselves. It was so with Richard Rawlings.

Circumstances cast him amongst the Tory party, through his connexions with Mr. Chippendale and the Dragonfelt family; and the advancement of his own interests led him to cultivate the alliance. Although the Tories, or, as they were now called, the Conservatives, had been defeated in many hard fights on their own battle-fields, during these intervening years, they were still the depositary of the sacred old principles of exclusiveness and class ascendancy. This was the right creed for the man who had sprung from the people, who had beaten down all obstacles in his course, and who yearned to flush his victories in the face of fortune. It was a crushing rebuke to pomp in high places, that one who came of nothing, without a name or an ancestor, friend, or patron, should thus demonstrate to the world how ready the stalled, privileged orders are to open their arms to Mammon, through whatever miry channels it approaches, or in whatever shape it presents itself. To be sure, in working out his grudge against social despotism in his own way, he became a social despot himself, forgetful of the nobler vindication of the grade from whence he sprang; but he, nevertheless, successfully illustrated the power of gold, to carry off in its retinue a wider homage than nobility itself.

Whatever of pride, or love, or tenderness there may have been in his nature, was garnered up in his children. Their aggrandizement was the darling object of his existence. A costly education had been bestowed upon them. There were not wanting luxuries and accomplishments befitting the destinies he had marked out for them. They were now emerging out of childhood, and the season was at hand when it was necessary to form plans for the future. In the midst of the weighty concerns that pressed upon him out-of-doors, Richard Rawlings was watchful of his growing responsibilities at home. His intercourse with society had already carried him into the presence of men far above him in position, and he had profited by his opportunities. Self-educated, observant, shrewd, and politic, not a jot of the knowledge thus acquired was wasted. Even to surface ceremonials, and the garniture of his house, nothing was omitted that could advance the scheme of life he had laid down.

The characters of Clara and Margaret came out more dis-

tinently and in stronger opposition as they grew in years. Clara, bright, gay, and bold, took all eyes by the brilliancy of her beauty and her overflowing spirits. In drawing-room attainments she outshone her sister, and attracted a wider circle of admiration. Like most young ladies, however, who are very quick at their studies, she was sadly wanting in perseverance, and, having vanquished the rudiments of an instrument or an art, she left it there and bounded off to something else. She painted, sang, played, and knew the elements of a great many graceful little accomplishments, which gave her the command of a dazzling variety of resources, not the less fascinating for being somewhat superficial. And Clara loved variety; and variety is, in its nature, fugitive, and would be spoiled by lingering and plodding and trying to be profound. She chattered in French and Italian, not very copiously, but quite enough for music and for imparting a sparkle to conversation, and never cared to trouble her head about them any farther. She loved new faces and new excitements, not that she was indifferent about the old ones, but that she was universal in her enjoyments. Everybody liked Clara, and Clara liked everybody; and if some thought that she liked them better than she liked others, and blamed her in the end for disappointing them, they only deceived themselves and did an injustice to her. She was neither capricious nor inconstant; but she delighted in novelty.

Such natures should be judged indulgently, for they are the soonest darkened by sorrow, careless and radiant as they seem. All this love of novelty was merely the fresh and buoyant impulse of her constitutional vivacity; and until there comes some serious demand upon her truth and steadfastness, we have no right to assume that she is not as capable of an inflexible virtue as other people who make a great show of whatever little gravity they have. It is as yet all summer with Clara, and we must let her flutter and sport, like a butterfly, among the flowers: winter will lay bare the pleasant garden time enough.

Clara was still Mrs. Rawlings' favourite, and more the favourite than ever. The versatility of the lively Clara enchanted her. A permanent conjuror on the establishment, who should dazzle her with a hundred new tricks a day, could not have amused her half so effectively. It was not difficult to entertain Mrs. Rawlings. The lighter the entertainment the better. And as Clara's gaiety played over the sur-

face with an incessant flutter, it was exactly the sort of mirth that was best calculated to win the heart of mamma.

Margaret set off her sister to the utmost advantage. Her auburn hair, and auburn eyes, her pale, pensive face, and the delicate cast of her figure, supplied a portrait that paired off in admirable contrast with the southern glow that lighted up the features of Clara. When you saw them together, you were at once struck by this difference between them, that Clara was a creature with whom a great number of people might fall in love, but that Margaret was more likely to fall in love herself. The sensibility of her character was expressed in the gentleness and sweetness of her manner, which spread a tone of romance over her whole being. A lover of books in an atmosphere which was not particularly encouraging to such pursuits, she was constantly thrown upon her own resources; and, while Clara was engaged in a round of pleasures, Margaret frequently indulged in the solitude that was more agreeable to her taste. But although their opposite tendencies were thus clearly marked, these sisters were bound up in each other by ties of the fondest affection. Clara especially idolised Margaret. She thought her the gentlest and tenderest being in the whole world. She loved in her what she did not care a pin's-head for herself, and would listen with beaming eyes, when they were alone, to Margaret's talk about old rhymes and touching stories, although little reached her ears but the melody of the voice she doated on. Nothing but Margaret's enthusiasm could prevail upon Clara to pore over a book. A glance at the title-page and a rapid run through the leaves was always enough to satisfy her curiosity; but when Margaret would read to her, she would sit entranced, not for the pleasure she derived from the lore that came floating upon her in those musical tones, but for the higher pleasure of making Margaret happy. She was very proud of Margaret, and of the acquisitions she had made in regions of study which her own temperament would never suffer her to explore. The love which grew up between them was fostered on Clara's side by a certain sense of her own superior strength in ordinary things, her greater power of casting off slights and vexations, and her indifference to trifles which wounded the more sensitive nature of her sister. She cast her radiance, like a protector, round the soft and lovable being who crept to her heart for shelter; and Margaret looked up to this strength with confidence and devotion, and

thought that there was no creature on earth so beautiful, noble, or unselfish, as Clara.

In one very important matter that entered into the everyday business of society there was a chasm between Mrs. Rawlings and her daughters. That amiable lady had not received the advantages of such an education as, in the turn of the wheel of fortune, she was enabled to confer upon them. The consequence was, they were considerably in advance of her on all points of taste and refinement.

But there was not so much danger in this inverted relationship as it might seem to threaten on the surface. People whose good-nature is more conspicuous than their understanding, exercise more influence than the world is disposed to allow. The strength and weakness of Mrs. Rawlings' character alike lay in her good-nature, and when this estimable quality is tempered by love, as it was in this instance, it is wonderful what a quiet sway it wields in its own easy and kindly way. Her opinions did not count for much, but her indulgent fondness for her children went a great way to secure their attachment. There was perfect confidence between them; they concealed nothing from her; flew to her upon all occasions with their little secrets; and if they did not get the wisest counsel from her, they got sympathy, which won them more securely.

As to the deficiencies of Mrs. Rawlings' education, which could not be evaded when they were closeted with their thoughts laid open to each other, she would adroitly refer them to the alterations that had taken place since her time. Girls were very differently brought up in her day. If her poor mother could get up out of the grave, she wouldn't know the world again, it was so changed. Half the things weren't thought of when she was young that girls were expected to know all about now-a-days. It might be all for the better; she couldn't say a word against that; she had never taken the trouble to look much into it; but it was a great satisfaction to her to feel that her young ladies had the best education, and were fit for any company in the land. This kind of talk of the old times, when girls were useful and innocent, and not half so knowing as the present generation, used to fall upon the ears of Clara and Margaret like a tradition, which made them look back with a dreamy reverence to the age of housewifery, and served unconsciously to check any undue arrogance about their own more showy acquirements.

Mr. Rawlings was never admitted to these conferences. He was not in the baby-house. In his presence, the domesticities were more reserved and subdued. There was no familiar confidence between him and his daughters. He governed by the strength of his judgment—which, with all respect for the constituted authority of heads of families, is a harsh controller of the young, when it happens not to be softened by a little toleration. With reasonable allowances for the temperament and opportunities of youth, the admonitions of experience are invaluable. But you must not attempt to measure the sapling by the girth of the oak.

Mr. Rawlings had lofty views for his daughters, and looked to their training with a severity which, in their ignorance of his objects, inspired them with rather more awe than love. Upon Margaret he bestowed his chief care. Her delicacy interested him, and he built his main hope upon the intellectual capacity which distinguished her above her sister. There was an ideal elevation in the character of Margaret which flattered his ambition. The giddy and volatile Clara belonged to another order, not less likely, perhaps, to win a high prize in the lottery of life, but affording less security to his calculations.

Amongst the families in the neighbourhood with whom the Rawlingses had formed a close acquaintance, the Winstons were the most intimate. Mr. Winston was a gentleman of easy fortune, who lived in a pretty secluded place called the Wren's Nest; and a pleasant little nest it was, covered over with ivy and creeping plants, shut in by flowering trees and evergreens, with its small gothic windows looking out upon a trout stream which, running in among the woods and round about the grounds, seemed to belong exclusively to that tiny territory.

Mr. Egerton Winston had no occupation upon earth, save and except his garden, and the newspaper. Life was a very tranquil business with him. Breakfast, an arm-chair, and a long spell at the paper, not a paragraph of which escaped him; a stroll in his slippers, dressing-gown, and velvet cap, into the plantation and garden, where many hours were got through in a manner which he could by no means satisfactorily explain; dinner and a nap, constituted the simple routine of his existence. Mrs. Winston relieved him of all trouble in household, and, indeed, all other affairs. She was the almoner of his property; a capital manager within doors, with a liberal, but prudent, attention to comfort and hospitality, and a Lady Bountiful to the poor.

They had two children, a son and daughter, two or three years older than Clara and Margaret. There was some indistinct intention of putting Henry into the Church, but Mr. Winston never took any practical step towards its accomplishment, and as the boy declared he would be a soldier, the good people thought it a pity to thwart his inclinations. As for genial little Rose Winston, whose round, merry face came upon you out of the bushes like a burst of sunshine, nobody ever thought of what was to be done with her. She was sure of a bright path to the end, whatever happened to the rest of the world.

The Winstons possessed within themselves all the elements of felicity,—love, health, respect, and confidence. They had not a single care to make a break in their serene sky. Some people make cares if they do not find them ready made ; but this was an exercise of ingenuity that never occurred to the Winstons. And they lived so pleasantly and contentedly, that the Wren's Nest, which lay smothered up in a dell of foliage, obtained among the Rawlingses the name of the Happy Valley, which it owed to the playful fancy of Margaret.

The boundary of the Wren's Nest ran up to Mr. Rawlings' grounds, and out of this circumstance sprang the acquaintance, begun by the children through the hedges, and ripened into familiar intercourse by the ladies. From that time forth the children were inseparable. They were, in some sort, brought up together, following the same pursuits, enjoying the same pastimes, and thrown into such constant intercourse as to be as much at home in one house as the other.

Mr. Rawlings felt that the social position of the Winstons was an advantage to his family. He was himself only on the threshold of society, and had much to learn. But his instincts led him in the right direction, and his discrimination of character was a safe guide in the choice of friendships. Mr. Winston was a Whig of the old school, with that hereditary touch of aristocracy in his nature which gives to the most careless actions an unmistakable air of good breeding. Everything within his house indicated the habits of a gentleman. There were no affectations of any kind ; no pretensions to superiority over neighbours ; no backbitings or whisperings, jars or jealousies ; no starched grandeurs, or clipped voices to show off before strangers ; you never could take them by surprise ; come when you might, there was no flurry or ruffling up of company manners ; the same composure, openness, and

sincerity met you at all hours ; there was no finery set out for visitors, with a domestic background of meanness and disorder. To the friends who were admitted to the Wren's Nest, the inner and every-day life of the Winstons was as transparent as crystal. Such associations were calculated to exert a refining and elevating influence over Clara and Margaret, and no man, who had not been born amongst them, was better able to appreciate them at their full value than Richard Rawlings.

Down by the brink of the clear stream to watch the minnows in the water, or away into the woods to chase the birds, went the four joyous children day after day ; and twilight found them at the height of their sports, pretending to lose their way in their own little domain, every step of which was as familiar as the stairs or the parlour ; hiding themselves in the shadows of the great trees, and, with their glowing faces, heated and wild with play, gathering home in the dark to go to bed, and dream it all over again. Happy, happy childhood, to which we look back through a mist of tears, upon the joys we prized so lightly in their passage ! There is no future in the lives of children. They live in the sweet blossoms and green leaves, and have no sense of the blight to come—that sense which shatters manhood, and makes all maturer happiness imperfect in the enjoyment. Who would not be a child again ? And what a glorious world of delights it would be if we could all be children to the end !

Henry Winston was, of course, the hero of these scenes—a daring, dashing fellow, with light blue eyes and dark rich hair, and as strong and courageous as a little lion. What special enchantment there is in blue eyes we know not, but we have understood that they are capable of wonderful softness and tenderness in certain moods, as of passionate energy under other circumstances of provocation. This was true, at all events, of Henry Winston's eyes. They were considered marvellously lovely and captivating in his boyhood. What time did with them afterwards, when they were dimmed by a little more rain than was good for their lustre, to which the strongest men's eyes are sometimes exposed, is no business of ours at present. Henry was an absolute madcap. How he used to frighten his companions by the terrible risks he ran, the trees he climbed, the perilous leaps he would make out of bravado, and the big boys he would fight when they came peeping over the hedge, and making jokes at the young ladies ! He was the *preux chevalier* of the Wren's Nest, and his frankness, gallantry, and hand-

some bearing did honour to the character. But this delectable life was not to last for ever. Henry was rising towards manhood, and there was some family talk of sending him to college. Mr. Winston considered it essential to his establishment in life. His own most valuable friendships were formed in college, and his pleasantest memories were associated with the days he passed at Christ Church. Henry demurred. What use would Aristotle and Homer be to him in the army? He had an ambition, nevertheless, for the *éclat* of the University Hallmark; but it was a struggle. He was happier at home, and didn't want to be sent away. And as the time approached when the matter must be decided one way or the other, he entertained a secret hope that it would be given up.

One wet afternoon in autumn, the little party were collected in the drawing-room, Clara and Rose busy over some drawings, Mrs. Winston occupied with a thrifty piece of needlework, and Henry and Margaret seated close by her in the window, watching the misty rain falling into the stream, and making it brown and sullen as it swept past.

The scene out of doors was dismal enough. The woods were shivering in the damp air; the fields were oozing with wet; little pools were formed here and there on the gravel walk, throwing back in bubbles the perpetual plash! plash! of the descending drops; small birds darted every now and then low down amongst the roots of the great trees, as if they were seeking out dry places; and even the winds that soughed through the branches had a watery sound. Once or twice Mr. Winston, in a great coat and an old hat, passed across the lawn, and made a wofully drizzling appearance, the grass gushing under his feet at every step. Every leaf and blade was dripping, and dreary clouds brooded over the picture.

"A pleasant day," said Henry. "I wonder how the robins like it. Twit!—twit!—twit! See that fellow hopping under the window. Let us give him some crumbs."

"No, my dear," cried Mrs. Winston; "don't open the window; we should have a flood in the room in a minute."

"Come here, Henry," said Clara; "look at this!"

"What is it?" inquired Henry.

"A view of the interior of the Bodleian Library," replied Clara. "How still and solemn it is."

"Very," said Henry. "Just the place to throw one into the blues. A library ought to be snug and warm—but this is as dismal as the nave of an old cathedral. The horrid silence

of that long, chilly room! The poor wretch there in the cap and gown looks as if he were ready to hang himself."

"But seclusion is the great charm of a library," observed Margaret; "don't you think so, Henry?"

"Not I, indeed," returned Henry. "It was all very well for the miserable old monks that used to be shut up with their books and missals, and knew nothing better; but for us who are to go out into the world, it's a complete damper. You wouldn't crush up the limbs of a child in a vice by way of training it to walk?"

"Ah! but the mind must be trained as well as the body, Henry," said Margaret.

"Of course," observed Mrs. Winston; "a very judicious remark, my dear."

"The fact is," said Henry, impatiently, "you all want to get me off to college. Now, confess the truth, Margaret— isn't that it? But I should like to know how you could get on without me? You'd be moped to death; and as for me, I should never study a bit."

"You mustn't talk in that way, Henry," cried Mrs. Winston; "if your papa thinks it necessary for you to go, you shouldn't make such foolish objections."

"Well, but can't I have tutors at home?" said Henry; "it's just the same thing, you know."

"We must leave that to papa," observed Mrs. Winston.

"*We* don't want you to go, I'm sure, Henry," said Clara; "we should miss you every hour in the day, shouldn't we, Rose?"

"Miss him?" cried Rose, laughing; "I wouldn't pay him such a compliment. I'm sure he's a great plague to us."

"I'm not gone yet," said Henry, "so don't flatter yourselves. I should like to stay if it were only to tease you."

"Vanity!" laughed out Rose. "Isn't he dreadfully spoiled, Margaret?"

Margaret looked up at Henry, who was watching for her answer, and seeing that he was a little ruffled, she said nothing, but merely smiled and shook her head. Henry threw off the rallery with as much gaiety as he could, and, humming a tune, turned again to the window, to try if he could collect any consolation from the rain.

"Mizzle—mizzle—mizzle!" he cried; "here comes my father, like a water-god, splashing through the rain. He must be drenched through and through by this time. There he goes right into the thick of it in the shrubbery."

All eyes were now gathered to the windows, as Mr. Winston disappeared in the shrubbery which conducted by a circuitous path to the front door. In a few minutes he was amongst them in the drawing-room.

"Well, Jenny, it's all settled at last," he exclaimed, addressing Mrs. Winston; "what a day it is, to be sure. But fine growing weather, girls,—fine growing weather."

"What is settled?" inquired Mrs. Winston.

"The post has just brought me a letter," he replied, "from that kind fellow, Plowden—not a jot changed since they made him a dean—not a jot; just the same open-hearted soul he was when he and I used to chop logic together. It's like old times, this—it is indeed. Thirty years ago—full that! How the world does gallop with some people and stand stock-still with others! Here have I been marrying, and digging, and giving hostages to the state, and Plowden has never stirred out of the cloisters—in the same room, the same old chair and table, cupboard, bookcase, and all. And, what's better, his heart's in the same place, too;—only there's a spice of his old fun in it, I'd shew you his letter, my love."

"Well, but what does he say?" asked Mrs. Winston.

"Say? everything, my dear," returned Mr. Winston; "he says he will take Henry himself, and watch over him as if he were his own son. I thought he would—I told you so. Henry, come here!"

"Sir!" exclaimed Henry.

"I didn't like to raise your expectations till everything was settled, my boy," said Mr. Winston; "so I wrote to my old friend, Dean Plowden, of Christ Church, about you, and I've got his answer, lad. What d'ye think?—what d'ye think? You set out for Oxford next week."

Henry's face coloured, and grew pale again at this announcement.

"It's all arranged, my boy," continued Mr. Winston, "all arranged—your first great step in life—and under such a man as Plowden. I really think I must go with you myself, if it was only for the pleasure of shaking dear Plowden by the hand once more." Then, turning to Mrs. Winston, he began to read the letter aloud, carefully stopping at the college jest, over which he chuckled to himself with renewed satisfaction.

There was a hush over everybody else in the room. All arguments, hopes, and doubts were now at an end. The die was cast, and that pretty picture of the Bodleian Library,

which looked so peaceful only a few minutes before, all at once grew very gloomy and sombre. The girls glanced under their eyelashes from one to another, and would have been glad to have made their escape for the relief of a little free breathing. When Mr. Winston had quite finished his enjoyment of the dean's joke, he turned round to explain matters more fully to his son, but Henry had stolen away unperceived.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH RICHARD RAWLINGS EXTENDS THE SPHERE OF HIS OPERATIONS.

RICHARD RAWLINGS was born under the luckiest of stars. Great men have sometimes been lost by coming a century before or behind their time. Richard came in the very crisis adapted for the effective display of his genius. A new element of power had arisen in the country, and was creating a revolution in the habits and character of the people. Science was the magician that had called it into existence, and money was the spell by which it was to be worked.

Not a great many years before the point of time at which we are now arrived, there was one solitary little railway straggling up somewhere in the north; in the interval, every corner of the kingdom was convulsed by projects which were to cover the land with a metallic network. The whole country, from coast to coast, was to be traversed and dissected by iron roads; wherever there was a hamlet or a cattle-track, a market or a manufactory, there was to be a railroad; physical obstacles and private rights were straws under the chariot-wheels of the Fire-King; mountains were to be cut through as you would cut a cheese; valleys were to be lifted; the skys were to be scaled; the earth was to be tunnelled; parks, gardens, and ornamental grounds were to be broken into; the shrieking engine was to carry the riot of the town into the sylvan retreats of pastoral life; sweltering trains were to penetrate solitudes hitherto sacred to the ruins of antiquity; hissing locomotives were to rush over the tops of houses; and it was not quite decided whether an attempt would not be made to run a railway to the moon.

If the solar system had been suddenly swept behind a veil of darkness, or the earth suspended on its axis, a greater ferment could not have been produced in the minds of the plodding population of these islands; more railroads were pro-

jected, by tens and hundreds, than funds could be collected to construct in a thousand years, or than the necessities of the country, if the traffic were to be increased a thousand-fold, could ever require.

A few dreamy individuals betrayed a sentimental antipathy to railroads. They looked upon them as having a tendency to desecrate the repose and vernal simplicity of the country, to fuse the city and the fields into one burning mass, and destroy for ever the poetry of the rural world. No more Crabbes or Thomsons; no more lumbering wagons plying on the highroads; no more tranquil dells; no more sleepy market-places, red cloaks, grey legends, or fairies! Others, wise from the experiences of the past, stood aloof, contemplating the fury of the masses, and watching its disastrous issues. But these exceptions had no more influence on the mania than specks of oil in a great tempestuous ocean.

A colony of solicitors, engineers, and seedy accountants had settled in the purlieu of Threadneedle. Every town and parish in the kingdom blazed out in zinc plates on the doorways. From the cellars to the roofs, every fragment of a room held its committee, busy over maps and surveys, allotments and scrip. The darkest cupboard on the stairs contained a secretary or a clerk, shut up and palpitating in its mysterious organism, like the lady in the lobster. To this focal centre were attracted the rank and wealth, the beggary and villany of three respectable kingdoms. Men who were never seen east of Temple-bar before, were now as familiar to the pavement of Moorgate-street as the stockbrokers who flew about, like messengers of doom, with the fate of thousands clutched in scraps of dirty paper in their hands. Ladies of title, lords, members of parliament, and fashionable loungers, thronged the noisy passages, and were jostled by adventurers and gamblers, rogues and impostors. From his garret in some nameless suburb, the outcast scamp; from his west-end hotel, the spendthrift fop; from his dim studio, the poor artist; from his starved lodging, the broken-down gentleman; from his flying address, the professional swindler; from his fine mansion, the man of notoriety, whose life was a daily fight to keep up appearances—poured petitions into Moorgate, every day, and every hour in the day, and every minute in the hour, to be allowed to participate in the bubbles which were blowing there faster than the impatient public, at the top of their velocity, could catch them.

Richard Rawlings noted carefully the signs of the times. Long before the fever had reached its height, he saw that it was setting in. Looking steadily through the glare that blinded most other people, he discerned the profits which a man of sagacity and energy might carve out of the universal madness; and he took his course with a resolution that never faltered.

There was a short starving railway near the seashore, the sleepers of which slept between Noplace and Nowhere. Its traffic was represented by a figure that disappeared so far back in the fractional parts of nothing, as to puzzle an arithmetician how to draw it out and exhibit it in an intelligible calculation. The shares were down to a fearful discount. The shareholders were delirious with terror about future responsibility, and ready to sell on any terms, but no terms could be got. When this tempting line was *in extremis*, Richard Rawlings purchased up shares to so large an extent, that he at once became the autocrat of the famishing board, which was only too happy to resign its dying functions into the hands of so bold a speculator. By a little skill in the management, and by making arrangements with other companies to link the isolated and forlorn railway to the general business of that part of the country, he rapidly revived its fortunes, and brought up the shares to a startling premium. The ascent of the first balloon, when it was liberated from the ground, and soared into the clouds, was not more surprising to the spectators than the astonishing rise of these apparently hopeless shares. The reputation of Richard Rawlings rose in proportion. He broke the back of at least one venerable saw, and soon came to be regarded as a prophet in his own country.

Founded upon his first success, and extended observation, a larger project now engrossed him. By the establishment of a railroad from Yarlton, which should connect the town with the main lines that run north and south, taking up his own little branch in its course, there was a certainty of increasing the value of property in that direction, and of bringing Yarlton into immediate communication with the metropolis. Selecting carefully the most available route, he found that it would be necessary to carry the line through the rich demesne of the Earl of Dragonfelt. This was sacred ground, fenced in and walled up from vulgar eyes, and jealously guarded at all its entrances by lofty gates and grand lodges. A brave man must he be who should open a pro-

posal to the Earl of Dragonfelt for invading the patrician stillness of his woods and parks. The landed proprietors were everywhere up in arms against the luckless engineers and their assistants, who were forced to come like thieves in the night to take their levels and measurements, at the risk of being shot by the keepers, to whom strict orders were issued to be on the look-out for them. The Earl of Dragonfelt had already prosecuted half-a-dozen of these scientific interlopers, and declared his determination to deal with all similar trespassers in the same way.

Richard Rawlings was not to be intimidated from the prosecution of his design by his lordship's powerful hostility; and, resolving to negotiate the matter in person, he presented himself for that purpose one fine summer's morning at Dragonfelt Hall. It was a stately old place, very gloomy and solemn, with a vast stone hall and staircase, and arched passages, breathing a dank and earthy atmosphere. A dreadful silence hung over it. One or two speechless livery servants glided like phantoms athwart the eternal shadows, and fear and awe seemed to creep in the shuddering winds up and down the dismal corridors, and through the jaws and joints of helmets and pieces of armour that stood out from the walls in ghastly array.

The Earl of Dragonfelt was in his library, a magnificent apartment, richly carpeted, and presenting a comfortable and luxurious contrast to the icy temperature and nakedness of the hall and passages by which it was reached. A single glance at the earl was sufficient to reveal to the most superficial observer the prominent attributes of his character. In person very large and stalwart, with a great head, covered by an enormous quantity of grey hair, billowy white whiskers flowing round his cheeks and under his chin, huge protruding eyebrows, sinister dark eyes, and a heavy sensual mouth, his appearance inspired you at once with feelings of aversion. You could see mixed up in the aspect of this massive man the repulsive elements of pride, selfishness, and predominant will backed up by a brute force which imparted an unmistakable, tone of violence to his passions. This is happily not the character of our English aristocracy—a race distinguished by nobility of person and graciousness of breeding. It is an exceptional character, bequeathed to us by the old feudal ages, and now almost extinct.

When Richard Rawlings was shown into the library, the

earl was seated in a great chair, in a morning-gown, with his legs stretched out, leaning back on his elbows, the points of his fingers being brought together before him, and clicked against each other, by way of marking the impatience he wished to impress upon the reception of his visitor. At the opposite side of a table crowded with pamphlets, newspapers, and writing materials, sat a thin, sallow gentleman, curiously shiny in appearance, his sleek hair brushed down over his forehead, with a pale glistening face, very smooth and unmeaning in expression, his shirt-collar turned down and showing his neck, a shirt with black studs, a narrow satin tie, a black satin waistcoat, and a full dress coat. There was something about the dress and bearing of this gentleman which suggested the notion of holiday finery, without taste or breeding. His manner was, nevertheless, quiet and indolent, except when he began to talk, and then the sleepy languor of his look vanished, and he kindled up into a sort of phosphoric glow, subsiding rapidly again into listlessness.

"I have taken the liberty, my lord," said Rawlings, after his lordship had made a ceremonial movement with his head, "to wait upon your lordship concerning a matter of public business."

"Public business?" repeated his lordship, slowly motioning him to take a chair. "Will it be a great bore to you?" continued his lordship, turning to the sallow gentleman.

"Not at all, my lord," returned the other; "I particularly esteem so favourable an opportunity of improving my information."

"Go on, Mr. Rawlings," said his lordship.

"Your lordship has heard of a projected railway between Yarlton and Hatchet Ferry?" observed Richard Rawlings.

"I *have* heard of it, and you ought to know that I am opposed to it. If that's your public business——"

"My object, my lord," interrupted Rawlings, "is to supersede a design which I am convinced must be attended with failure."

"By proposing another in its place, I suppose?"

"Yes. I am prepared with such a project."

"I suspected as much."

"If your lordship will allow me to explain——"

"Oh! let us have it, by all means."

"A line from Yarlton to the Dosberry branch, which joins the main trunk at Oldbeach," said Richard, "would open a di-

rect communication between London and the borough. I need not point out the local advantages of such an undertaking."

"No,—you may save yourself the trouble," returned his lordship; "pray, Mr. Rawlings, when this patriotic design entered your head, did it occur to you that there were any difficulties in the way?"

"I have fully considered all that, my lord," said Rawlings, "and have brought with me an outline map on which the route is traced. Your lordship will see here——"

"Yes, I do see here," said his lordship, looking at the map, "and I should like to know, sir, upon what pretence you propose to break into my property, and drive your steam-engines through my park?"

"Upon the only pretence, my lord," replied Richard, "that can justify the sacrifice of private interests—the public convenience."

"What do you think of that?" inquired his lordship, smiling grimly at his friend.

"Well, if you ask my candid opinion," returned the other, "I must say that it strikes me as a pretty considerable demonstration of democratic sentiment."

"Democratic!" cried his lordship; "why, sir, we have agitated the puddle in this country so successfully of late years, that the mud no longer lies in its slimy bottom, but is all thrown up to the surface. A man can't call his own his own. Here comes a gentleman who, without leave or licence, coolly announces a proposal for establishing a highway across my lawn—right under my windows—and who thinks no more of cutting up an hereditary estate of some centuries' growth, than of pulling down a hen-roost. And, in the new vocabulary, this is what is delicately called sacrificing private interests to public convenience."

"Your lordship, I am sure," said Richard Rawlings, "would not object to a slight infringement on a corner of your estate, if it could be shown to confer a great public benefit."

"But suppose I do object?" exclaimed his lordship; "suppose I regard such an infringement as an impudent attempt at violation of the rights of property? what then?"

"Why, then, my lord," returned Rawlings, "it will be useless to discuss the matter any further; it must be left to rest upon public grounds alone."

"What do you mean by public grounds?" demanded his lordship; "what business have the public to break into my

park? Your mob of smashers, rick-burners, and thieves, might as well break into my wine-cellar, and set fire to my house. Public grounds, sir?—public robbery. You think I'll submit to such acts of violence? You're mistaken. You don't know me, and the wisest thing you can do is to mind your own business, and let me mind mine. If you've a grain of sense you'll take warning in time. You're knocking your head against a stone wall."

"My lord," said Rawlings, "I have as great a respect as your lordship for the rights of property, and must take the liberty of saying that your allusion to rick-burners and thieves is not likely to turn me from my purpose. My motive in waiting on your lordship was to consult your wishes in the first instance; for once the project is put into shape, it will be beyond your lordship's control, or anybody else's. I am sorry you should put an offensive construction upon my object."

"Offensive? pish!" cried his lordship; "who ever dreamt of offending you? And who cares a rush whether you are offended or not? I suspect, Mr. Rawlings, that you imagine you can exercise an influence over me by other means; but you deceive yourself. Listen to me—I will make short work of your notable scheme. The first man who sets foot on my ground shall be lodged by the heels in the county-gaol—and if my keepers catch any of your gang of engineers marauding at night about my property, let them look for a more summary process than judge and jury. Now, sir, you have got my answer."

"I submit, my lord," said Richard Rawlings, "that this is not an answer to anything I have said."

"It is an answer to your map, sir, which I take it is tolerably lucid as to what you meant to say."

"My lord," returned Rawlings, "you deal with this question as if it were personal to me. Allow me to remind your lordship that it concerns the public at large; and since your lordship will not entertain it in the shape of private negotiation, it shall be removed to a tribunal whose decision will command respect—even from your lordship."

"Remove it where you please, sir," exclaimed his lordship, rising and ringing the bell, "so as you remove yourself from my presence."

"I shall not fail, in due season," replied Richard Rawlings, making a profound bow, "to remember your lordship's courtesy. You have taught me a rough lesson, my lord, but I

believe a useful one. I thank you for inflicting upon me the weight of your lordship's position, which has shewn me clearly what is due to my own." And with these words he withdrew.

On his ride back, Richard reflected on the reception he had met with. The haughtiness of the earl revived the bitterness of earlier feelings. But circumstances were widely different now from what they had been when his spirit was wrung by a meaner tyranny in his youth. He was now a man of some mark in the world, and had lived down the contumely and scorn that rear their heads of venom, and hiss in the path of the poor and meanly born. Why should he submit to opprobrium from the Earl of Dragonfelt? Why should he not rather resent, revenge it? Revenge? A great opportunity was already casting its shadow before. The dissolution of parliament was at hand, and Lord Valteline, who had stepped into the borough by an arrangement with Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, was about to present himself for the second time to the suffrages of the constituency. What if the proud crest of the Dragonfelts were humbled on the hustings in the face of the electors, and the son stripped of his senatorial honours in revenge for the insult of the father? How could this be done? The Dragonfelt family were omnipotent in Yarlton. A light breaks—there are means for its accomplishment more effective than bribery, partisanship, or family connexions, and Richard Rawlings has the control of them in his own hands.

The next morning a highly-glazed card was sent in to him, with the name written in pencil, in a small, fine hand, of "Joel Washington Trumbull." Presently the proprietor of the card made his appearance in the person of the sallow gentleman in the satin waistcoat, whom Richard had met the day before in the library at Dragonfelt Hall.

"I esteem it a great privilege, Mr. Rawlings," said Mr. Trumbull, "to have the honour of shaking you by the hand. I calculate upon many privileges in your fine country; but, as a free citizen of the noblest nation in all creation, I reckon the highest gratification I can aspire to is to make the acquaintance of a man of independent principles."

"You flatter me, sir," replied Rawlings, drawing up a little in surprise. "Do you come from the Earl of Dragonfelt?"

"I should say not, Mr. Rawlings," returned Mr. Trumbull. "I am come off-hand on an original speculation of my own. It struck me yesterday that you went slick at his lordship, and whipped him to a stand-still. It was a grand spe-

cimen of the dignity of the human species, and I thank you, sir, for that noble assertion of the democratic sentiment in the name of the rights of man, which are developed in my country, Mr. Rawlings, to the wonder and admiration of the whole civilized world."

"I do not very clearly understand you, Mr. Trumbull," said Rawlings. "Pray enlighten me."

"I am a native of Massachusetts," said Mr. Trumbull; "by birth a citizen of the American Republic; but I do not forget that I am also a member of the great human family. I have visited your country for the purpose of observing the manners and customs of your people, and I esteem it a high privilege to be admitted to the recesses of your domestic life, which will enable me to expound to my own countrymen the remarkable usages by which your society is distinguished. I have explored the sublime rivers and magnificent prairies of that wonderful continent, Mr. Rawlings, where the real nine-foot man, made of cast-iron with steel springs, makes eternal smash of the poetry of the wilderness. But there's something more stupendous than rocks and cataracts, and muscles stub-twisted, and knit in and in with horse-shoe nails;—I mean human nature, Mr. Rawlings, in its state of intensified civilization. That's, right through, the most miraculous of all—the rocks and cataracts of the human heart, melted down and pumped dry by a system of artificial expedients."

"I presume you have not been long in England?" observed Richard, hardly knowing what to say in reply to this bewildering apostrophe to human nature.

"Three clear months," replied Mr. Trumbull; "and during that epoch I have visited some of your principal nobility, and seen how they get along in their own houses. How they do chaw up the people, Mr. Rawlings! We've nothing like that in the whole length and breadth of the Union; and it throws all my speculations into a heap of pretty considerable chaos to contemplate the fix they would find themselves in if they were to try on some of their despotic operations in my country. Why, they'd be wound up and squashed in no time. Now, I look upon you, Mr. Rawlings, to be a down, fast, out-and-out man, with a biler inside that will steam a-head in spite of all impediments."

"Your opinion of the upper classes, I am afraid," observed Richard, "is not very favourable."

"I think they beat us hollow in the soft-sawder line," re-

plied Mr. Trumbull. "We can't come up to them, no how, there. When you squat down in a grand house here, you live at your ease, as if the whole concern belonged to you; but it requires a windlass to draw up a natural man to the top of their ceremonials. I've been taking notes of their modes and habits, and there's no end to 'em. It strikes me, Mr. Rawlings, that though they have their feet in the clay, like other people, they carry their heads out of sight up in the clouds. I calculate your aristocracy will take a long time a-drowning."

"But upon the aristocracy, after all," Richard ventured to interpose, "depends the solidity of our institutions."

"That's a remarkable observation," rejoined Mr. Trumbull. "It's just like building a house upside down. That's not the way we go to work in America. *We* make our foundations in the earth; we base everything on the people; and it will be an immortal tempest that will shake the eternal institutions of the Union. The thing's impossible, by no means whatever; and when your monarchies and nobilities are scattered like wrecks upon the great ocean of time, the banner of the Stripes and Stars will float sublimely over them, and the Republic will be heard through all eternity, singing out, 'Hail, Columbia, happy land!'"

"You really think so?"

"I'm clear convinced of it. What can come of a country where the principle of representation—the first law of the universe—is a mere sham?"

"Will you be good enough to explain yourself, Mr. Trumbull?" said Richard.

"Square yourself, then, Mr. Rawlings, for I'm coming to the clockworks. His lordship tells me you're going to have a general election, and, being curious to get all the information I can on the machinery of your complicated society, he lets me see how the wheels are greased beforehand. Now it's quite transparent to me that the electors have no more to do with it than so many spades and shovels. They're clawed up and bowled out long before they come to the poll. That's my speculation on the case. While men like you, Mr. Rawlings, are waiting to get in at the reg'lar time, when the doors of the Constitution are to be opened to the public at large, the aristocracy are letting themselves in at the private entrance with a latch-key."

"There's some truth in that, Mr. Trumbull," replied

Richard; "but we have made great reforms in these matters, and it is necessary to proceed cautiously in a country where there are so many distinct classes and interests. The earl, no doubt, possesses a commanding influence, but it is a principle in our constitution that a peer cannot interfere in elections."

"A principle with a great many holes in it," returned Mr. Trumbull. "You set up a particular strong edifice, and then take the mortar out, and let the bricks tumble to pieces. Look at this borough of Yarlton—his lordship's as sure of it as if it was double-buckled up in the pocket of his porcupine jacket."

"He is?" echoed Richard.

"Now that's what I want to see, Mr. Rawlings. I want to see a right down popular election; to wedge in among the bilers, and see how you get up the steam. You're a go-ahead man, and can get me a sitting to witness the performances."

"But if there's no opposition to Lord Valteline's return," replied Richard, "there will be nothing to see. His lordship will make a speech, and there will be an end of it. The election, however, may furnish you with materials for further speculation on the strange things that happen in this country, and there is no reason why your curiosity shouldn't be satisfied."

"I've taken a fancy to you—I have," returned Mr. Trumbull, "and if ever you should find your way to Massachusetts, U.S., you may reckon on my hospitality—that's a fact. Joel Washington Trumbull, I live on my own estate, don't owe a dollar to any man, warranted true whalebone back and front, and not an ounce of blubber."

It was quite true there wasn't an ounce of blubber on Mr. Trumbull, and the whalebone he spoke of might account for the elasticity of his frame throughout this rapid colloquy, during which he could not be prevailed upon to sit down, but kept sawing the air with his arm, running his hand in a jerking manner up his back, as if he were feeling for a bowie-knife, and twisting his body into a variety of distressing and perilous contortions.

At parting, Mr. Trumbull renewed his professions of admiration of Mr. Rawlings' go-ahead disposition, and volunteered to collect a budget of news about the election manoeuvres of the Valteline party. Richard Rawlings was not indisposed to encourage an acquaintance so likely to be useful

at this juncture ; for it was evident that the Earl of Dragon-felt received Mr. Trumbull, on the credit of letters of introduction, with implicit confidence, and talked freely before him about the election business, and, indeed, all other matters. So, before they separated, it was agreed that Mr. Trumbull was to repeat his visit on an early day.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH AN UNEXPECTED SHOT IS FIRED INTO THE TOWN OF YARLTON.

THE departure of Henry Winston for Oxford left a sensible blank in the little circle at the Wren's Nest. But that was not all. It suggested to the young people that they were no longer children, and awakened them to the fact that they were growing up, and entering upon the verge of those tremulous experiences at which responsibility begins. Henry Winston was now out in the world—he was no more to be regarded as the playmate—all the signs and tokens of manhood were showing themselves in him—he was acquiring new views and habits—and who could tell what changes might be wrought in his tastes, feelings, and character by separation from his family, and residence at the University? There was much anxiety on these points, and they were frequently discussed by the girls when they were alone. They had great confidence in the purity of his heart and disposition, as most people have in persons to whom they are strongly attached ; still they were not the less eager to obtain frequent intelligence of his progress, as an assurance that he continued to remember his home and his playfellows with unabated affection. Clara and Margaret were quite as much interested about him as Rose herself ; but they felt that his removal to Oxford gave him a sort of brevet-rank as a man, which threw a reserve over their intercourse. The old familiarity gradually resolved itself into more careful forms of expression, out of that dawning consciousness of womanly instincts which the wisdom of years may be permitted to look back upon with regret as the first shadow that falls on the sunny path of childhood. They liked him as much as ever—missed him grievously—and would have been as glad as ever to have romped through the woods with him : but—but—Henry was no longer a boy !

Months passed away, and he never failed in writing home once a week. He had a world of gossip to relate about the college—what fellows he had to supper—what companionships he was forming—what odd things were said and done by worthy crusty Dean Plowden, whom, in a private postscript to mamma, he described as a kind-hearted old bear. It was evident that his time was fully engrossed, and that he had not much leisure to indulge in home reminiscences; yet, although his letters were nearly all filled with his own history, he seldom forgot to throw in a dash of kind remembrances to his old friends and companions. In one of his letters he said, "Let Clara and Margaret know that I am cramming very hard, and intend to come home so learned, that I shall look to be treated with the utmost respect. Tell Margaret that she was quite right about the library. It's not half so dull a place as I thought it was. I spend all the time I can there." When he did come home in the vacation there was decidedly a change. The boyish hilarity was fled; his animal spirits had gone off in another direction; he no longer treated the girls as children; the topics between them were no longer the same; the colour and tone of his conversation were deeper and bolder; and the little turns of raillery which formerly exploded in laughter, were now spiced with compliment and repartee. He was abundantly amusing, had a multitude of anecdotes to relate, and seemed all at once to have sprung up into a wit. They were not exactly sure that they liked the new phase as well as the old one; but he was only passing through the first stage of life, and everybody was willing to make allowances.

The approach of the general election threw the little town of Yarlton into a grand ferment. Rumours were abroad, though nobody could tell how or where they originated, that there was an intention of starting a candidate to oppose the return of Lord Valteline. At first, this was treated as an idle story; and a glance at the constituency was sufficient to satisfy any new candidate that he had not the slightest prospect of success. The Dragonfelts, in fact, had the borough completely at their own disposal; the electors were all known; and every man of them, from a prudent regard to his own interests, was devoted to the interests of the earl. As the time drew near, the rumours died away, for no candidate appeared; and Lord Valteline, taking possession of the Grundy Arms, where his committee went through the form of lolling

out of the windows, issued his address to the "Free and Independent Electors of the Borough of Yarlton."

Matters went on very smoothly during the canvass, which, in the absence of his lordship, was conducted by his committee, out of deference to the old constitutional practice. As to Lord Valteline, he thought it would be time enough for him to appear at the nomination. The result of the canvass was decisive. Even if an opposition were to start up, it couldn't poll a dozen votes.

Within a week of the day fixed for the election, the inhabitants of Yarlton, on getting up out of their beds, and walking into the streets, were struck with unspeakable amazement at seeing a placard, in the following terms, posted up in all parts of the town :

"TO THE ELECTORS OF YARLTON.

"GENTLEMEN,—A general election restores to your hands the exercise of the elective franchise, and I avail myself of the occasion to solicit your suffrages, as a candidate for the honour of representing your ancient borough in Parliament.

"My principles are Conservative. I am an advocate for such reforms as shall be proved to be necessary ; but I am opposed to rash innovations. What is called popular feeling is not always the safest guide to that course which is best for the public good. To confer sound and substantial benefits on the country, we must legislate for the interests, and not for the passions, of the people.

"In this hasty address I cannot go into details, but I shall feel it my duty to lay before you, without loss of time, a full exposition of my political views.

"Connected with the trade and industry of your town, a resident amongst you, and having a personal interest in your prosperity, I am acquainted with your wants and desires, and will undertake to represent them with a zeal which shall, at least, possess the advantage of being practical.

"The diversion of great masses of capital to the establishment of a system of railway communication over the country has opened up a new field of profitable enterprise. Already largely engaged in these operations, and qualified by experience to estimate their importance, I shall labour strenuously to obtain for your town a participation in their advantages. Should you do me the honour to elect me as your representative, one of my first objects will be to obtain a bill

for a line of railroad that shall form a direct communication between Yarlton and London.

"I am, Gentlemen, your obedient servant,

"RICHARD RAWLINGS."

Although we have never witnessed such a catastrophe, we can form a general notion of the effect that would be produced in a quiet country town, in a season of profound peace, if a bombshell were suddenly to descend and explode in the middle of the main street on market-day. We know of nothing in the way of a simile (only we are sorry it is so old) that comes so near the consternation produced in Yarlton by the publication of this address. People refused to believe their eyes. Men with spectacles took them off, rubbed them, and tried again. Round the corners, under the gateways, and down the by-lanes, clusters of people might be seen all that day whispering to each other like conspirators. The agitation in front of the Town-hall exhibited that lively emotion and eager curiosity which usually precede an execution; and, as the crowds increased, broke up, and parted, making way for new streams of gaping idlers, speculation took so many shapes, that at least a score of different versions of the affair were in circulation before nightfall.

Lord Valteline's committee were indignant. They treated the thing, of course, with immeasurable ridicule and contempt, as if they affected to think it a hoax; but there it was notwithstanding, and they couldn't look out of the windows without seeing the Drake's Head opposite (where Rawlings' committee was established) placarded with "Rawlings and Commerce," "Vote for Rawlings," "Rawlings, Railways, and Independence," &c. The whole town seemed to be blistered over with the name of "Rawlings." Whichever way they turned, up or down the street, it glared upon them in great sprawling letters. The most mortifying part of the business was, that Rawlings should have presumed to start on the same political principles as Lord Valteline, at the risk of dividing the Conservative interest. If he had put up as a Whig or a Radical, Lord Valteline would, at least, have been able to detach and combine the whole Conservative party; but, by hazarding a division amongst them, he at once exposed the borough to an assault from the Liberals. Here was a capital point to work up against him—a disgraceful piece of political treason; and it was accordingly unanimously

resolved that Rawlings should be denounced as a hireling from the enemy's camp. With respect to his clap-traps about the trade of the town, and railway enterprise (which the Earl of Dragonfelt took as a personal indignity), the committee determined to set all that aside as a mere stock-jobbing imposition. The mode and manner of dealing with the new candidate gave them much consideration, and elicited a variety of original suggestions. Some were for issuing a hand-bill, offering a reward to any person or persons who could furnish them with authentic information as to who this Richard Rawlings was; others were for publishing a short account of his life, in which the obscure incidents of his rise and progress should be exhibited in a series of caustic sketches; and one gentleman proposed that a placard should be put out, with an accurate description of the person of one Richard Rawlings missing; and that the bellman should be employed to cry him through the town.

While the committee were deliberating over these measures, Richard Rawlings was actively employed in addressing different meetings of the electors. He was not much practised in public speaking, but a man with a purpose, firm nerves, and clear head, can never be at a loss on such occasions. His reception, upon the whole, was more favourable than he had calculated upon. They heard with attention what he had to say about the questions which immediately affected their own interests, and seemed to think that he was a fit and proper person to represent them; but the tide of local influence ran so strongly, that they dispersed without any further manifestation of opinion. He had gained, however, all the ends he aimed at; made himself personally known to the constituency, and set them thinking how much better they would be off if they could get a practical man instead of a popinjay.

After a day of constant movement, Richard Rawlings returned home late in the evening, and was surprised to find that Mr. Pogey had been waiting full half an hour to see him. Pogey, who has grown very pursy since we saw him last, with a silvery tinge through his hair, which you could see flickering in streaks up and down if he sat between you and the candle, had evidently something very important to communicate.

"Ha!" said Richard Rawlings, with a pleasant electioneering smile; "this is really friendly of you, Pogey. Come to give me your vote—sit down—sit down. I can't offer you

a supper of oysters, such as we used to have in the old times, you remember, but you may command anything else in the house. What shall it be?"

"Vote? vote?" said Pogeys, walking up and down the room; "nonsense—nonsense! I don't care if I do take something. What have you got there?—eh?—a little brandy and water—that will do—I never was in such a state of excitement in my life."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Richard; "sit down, and compose yourself."

"Compose myself? Easily said. What's all this about, Mr. Rawlings? what's it all about? Will you be good enough to explain to me the meaning of that extraordinary document I see posted all over the town, with your name at the foot of it?—eh? What does it mean?"

"Exactly what it says," replied Rawlings.

"Am I to understand that you are a candidate for the representation of Yarlton against Lord Valteline? or is it only a joke?"

"It is a simple matter of fact," returned Rawlings.

"A matter of fact!" said Pogeys; "I shouldn't be surprised if the sky would rain larks after that. The thing's impossible. It's the world to a China orange against you."

"Well, I'm determined to take my chance, notwithstanding," replied Rawlings; "*you'll* vote for me, at all events, and that's something."

"I?" screamed Pogeys; "I vote for you? Don't you know that I'm medical attendant to the household at Dragonfelt Hall? Twenty pounds a-year all round. Very fine to talk about 'throwing physic to the dogs!' 'Pon my life, I can't afford to throw physic away in that style. To tell you the truth, between you and me—I don't mind saying this confidentially to an old friend,—I oughtn't to be here now—it's a dereliction of principle,—but I couldn't sleep in my bed to-night without coming up to give you a friendly hint—a word to the wise. You'll ruin yourself if you don't resign before nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Don't be so mysterious, my good friend," returned Rawlings. "What do you mean?"

"Well, I can't precisely tell you," said Pogeys; "it would be a breach of confidence—hang me if ever I was so much put out by anything. You know I take the world pretty comfortably—not very easily ruffled—have had my share of the rough

and the smooth—balance them in a pair of scales; if there's too much vexation at one side, throw in a little extra enjoyment at the other, and so get them right in the end. True philosophy that—eh? But this business; I don't know how it is—it teetotally upsets my equilibrium.” Saying which, Mr. Pogeyp gulped down half a tumbler of brandy and water.

“I don't ask you to commit a breach of confidence, Pogeyp,” observed Rawlings; “but after such an alarming hint, you ought to give me some clue to your meaning.”

“You'll not betray me?” said Pogeyp.

“I pledge myself to the strictest confidence,” replied Rawlings.

Pogeyp settled himself in his chair, and, leaning over the table, began to rub his knee. “I'm on Lord Valteline's committee,” he whispered; “did you know that?”

“No, I did not,” replied Rawlings, echoing the whisper.

“Well, does anything dawn upon you now?”

“Nothing whatever, except your very good-natured face. Go on.”

“I *am* going on; only let me do it my own way. The committee have been sitting all day on your address.”

“Good.”

“Bad—as bad as bad can be. They are determined to bring up everything they can against you.”

“No!”

“I don't like to see you take it so coolly. I wish my patients to know the worst, and then let them follow my advice or their own. That's what I call open treatment—honest—aboveboard. Now, if I warn you of your danger, and you won't take my prescription, I wash my hands of the consequences. Plain English that.”

“The English is plain enough,” said Rawlings; “but I haven't the remotest suspicion of what you are driving at?”

“None so blind,” answered Pogeyp, “as those that won't see. Just take a perspective view of your life, and tell me if you think it would do you any good to have it all blazoned out to the world.”

“My life,” replied Richard Rawlings, “has been a life of exertion and progress. I am what I am by my own unaided efforts. I began without friends or resources.”

“Yes, that's it—now then—without resources,” repeated Pogeyp, laying a strong emphasis on the last word.

“Without one penny piece,” returned Rawlings. “I have

built up my own fortune. What have they to say to that? Why, that I was born in poverty, and that I have raised myself to independence; that when Lord Valteline was wasting in profligacy the hard-earned fruits of other people's industry, I was toiling to lay the foundations of a position which entitles me to meet his lordship face to face on the hustings. Let them blazon it in full. My life? Lord Valteline had best look to his own. Which of the two do you think a man would have most reason to be proud of?"

"Very true, very true," replied Pogeey; "but consider—Lord Valteline can afford to be attacked. What does he care? He can carry everything before him; and as to profligacy and so forth, it's so common to people of his rank, that nobody minds it; they make a boast of it; it's a feather in their cap, especially with the women. A different case with you. He stands upon his title, and snaps his fingers at defamation; you have nothing to rely upon but character—character, Mr. Rawlings. I believe that's practical—eh?"

"Perfectly practical," replied Richard Rawlings; "there's no escape for a man who makes his own way in the world; he is picked to pieces, suspected, sneered at, slandered; while people like Lord Valteline may do what they please with impunity. I am prepared for that. Depend upon it, I did not enter upon this contest without weighing the consequences. And so they intend to attack my character?"

"I didn't say that," returned Pogeey, beginning to look a little alarmed; "but they *have* fished up some queer stories, and, if you persevere, they will certainly publish them. I wish I was out of it. I've a great mind to be suddenly taken ill, and keep my bed till it's over."

"It would be wiser to tell me in confidence all you know," said Richard; "by that means you may save your twenty pounds a-year, and make a friend of me into the bargain. Come, you're a man of experience, and ought to make the most of your opportunities."

"Ah! well, there's something in that," replied Pogeey, "only you mustn't blame me, or suppose that I have any hand in it. The fact is, I don't know where they got their information; but they have the whole story about old Raggles, and things I never heard or dreamt of."

"What things?" demanded Richard.

"That's the extraordinary part of it. I never knew that old Raggles made a will."

"Nor did he," said Richard.

"So I said," replied Pogey; "and I told them I had your authority for it; but they only laughed at me. You know there *was* a secret, Mr. Rawlings—that is—I don't know anything about it; but Raggles had something on his mind, and wouldn't tell it to anybody but you."

"I understand," said Rawlings; "the story is this,—that Mr. Raggles made a will, and that I suppressed it. This is what they mean to impute to me?"

"Well, it *is* something of that kind," returned Pogey.

"The darker the better for their purpose," observed Rawlings. "Now, Pogey, I have only one word to say upon this business. Let me recommend you to have nothing to do with it. It will be cheaper for you to give up the Dragonfelt household all round, than risk your good name with the committee, if they venture upon so desperate an experiment. You are my chief witness. Don't be alarmed. I haven't the least intention of meddling with you, unless I am compelled to it, in self-defence. But, as certain as there is law in England, I will prosecute, to the last extremity, every person, high or low, to whom I can trace the remotest connexion with this scandalous, but very shallow, falsehood. That's plain English, I believe—eh?"

"No doubt of it," replied Pogey. "I'm glad to hear you take it up so warmly. I don't believe a word of it myself. But they want to know where you got money to begin with. That's the point. Everything must have a beginning. I had a beginning myself. You must have had a beginning. They say—but it's only suspicion, after all—that the night you were up with Raggles alone you got possession of something. If it wasn't a will, what was it? Only just tell me, between ourselves, what I am to say, and I'll say it; and if they don't back out of it after that, I'll have a fit of the jaundice to-morrow that will lay me up for a fortnight."

"The best thing you can say," returned Richard, "is that, as you were not present, you really don't know anything about it. There is no doubt, Pogey, I had a beginning. It is a very sensible remark; and I am not at all disposed to dispute its truth. I was born. My beginning was very much like everybody else's. I starved and struggled, and struggled and starved. I saw how the poor were crushed and buffeted, and that the only chance a man had of making his passage through life a passage of ease, instead of pain and misery, was to secure

an independence. I laboured for that; I devoted my whole energies of mind and body to that one object. When a man is in earnest, he is generally successful. I have succeeded, and I mean to persevere till I throw back in the face of the world, to which I owe nothing, the scorn and hardships it bestowed so bountifully upon me when I was steeped to the lips in want and drudgery. If the committee are very curious to know how I have done this, you may tell them I have done it by pursuing a fixed course with unflinching resolution."

"Very honourable to you, Mr. Rawlings," cried Pogey, with a strong emotion swimming and glimmering in his eyes,— "very; it's shameful that a man can't rise in the world without being exposed to slander: I have had enough of it in my time—professional jealousies—Mr. Rawlings. You'd hardly believe it; they stop at nothing. Envy, malice, and uncharitableness. But, looking at the election—Don't you think, as a friend, you'll only throw away your money? We have canvassed the whole town, and booked a majority of ten to one."

"As a friend, then," replied Rawlings, "you may make your mind easy. On this day week I shall be elected member for the ancient and loyal borough of Yarlton."

Pogey sat bolt upright in his chair, struck the table with his clenched hand, and with a mixed expression of awe and astonishment in his open eyes and mouth, tried to say something, but could not get it out. The quiet confidence with which Richard Rawlings made this astounding announcement paralysed him. He had hitherto considered the Dragonfelt family all-powerful in that neighbourhood, and this free and easy way of turning them out of the borough seemed to him like a piece of witchcraft. When he recovered a little from his amazement he did not know exactly what to say; to confess the truth, he was a little incredulous, and began to entertain a secret suspicion that Richard Rawlings wasn't quite right in his head. At last he started up, and put on his coat.

"I must get home," he cried,— "member for Yarlton! You're a wonderful man, Mr. Rawlings. Of course you know best; but I hope, as a friend—well!—I wish you success with all my heart! As to my vote, you know it's bespoke; can't help that,—member for Yarlton! I'd vote for you if I could—only one doesn't go for much—besides, you don't want it, you know—sure of your election—eh? Wonderful!—good night! Keep your head cool—nothing like that. Avoid stimulants—a little sherry and water, effervescing draughts, weak tea, fish,

chicken, chop—easily digested. Don't allow yourself to be excited—good night! Sleep as much as you can. How's your pulse;—steady—wonderful!—member for Yarlton. Well, I must get home—good night!” and out he went, closing the door quickly after him. All the way home Mr. Pogey, making every now and then a short run, and pulling himself up to breathe, continued muttering, “Member for Yarlton!—wonderful—well—member for—pish!—ha!—ho!—wonderful!”

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH AN EVENT TAKES PLACE THAT INFLUENCES THE LIVES OF ALL
OUR HEROES AND HEROINES.

THERE was a prodigious bustle for the next few days. The Valteline committee appeared to have thought better of their slaughterous intentions. They neither charged Mr. Rawlings with the suppression of a will, nor had him cried through the streets by the bellman. They contented themselves with simply asking the electors a variety of questions, under the head of “Queries for Electors,” in which they gibbeted the opposition candidate by innuendo, as a person whom nobody knew, who had never taken any part in public life, a railroad jobber, a money-lender, and a Radical in a mask. Innumerable hand-bills were circulated, in which these imputations were dispersed in detail in other forms; and open carriages, with flags and banners, went up and down the town, crowded with bands of music, and people standing up on the seats shouting for “Valteline,” and the “Agricultural Interest,” and the “British Constitution,” and “No Surrender.” From the violent enthusiasm displayed by the persons in the carriages, it might be inferred that the three estates of the realm were reduced at that moment to some imminent peril, and that their rescue from destruction depended upon the return of Lord Valteline. A great deal of money was spent in this way, and his lordship's committee had the satisfaction of obtaining ample interest on their outlay in noise and confusion.

Mr. Rawlings' committee conducted themselves more peaceably. They made no display, and went to very little expense. They treated the squibs of the opposite party with silent indifference. In the addresses which they issued, there was no allusion whatever to Lord Valteline. They appealed to the constituency as if there was no such person as his lordship in

existence; nor could the taunts and bravadoes of the hired agents who paraded the streets, and endeavoured to get up riots under their windows, tempt them into reprisals. Crikey Snaggs, who had not one moment's rest throughout this momentous week, highly disapproved of the placidity of the committee. It was difficult to raise the ire of Crikey Snaggs. He was naturally of a dull and somnolent temperament. But when his blood was up he was fierce and passionate, and exhibited symptoms of an heroic spirit which nobody could expect to find lurking under so stagnant a surface. The wild excitement of the election, working upon his devoted attachment to Mr. Rawlings, called into full play the latent energies of his character. He could not endure to hear the name of his benefactor, who held a much loftier place in his estimation than the whole race of the Dragonfelts, bandied about in a contemptuous and insulting way by the mob; and once or twice he rushed out into the thick of them, inspired with a terrible tingling at the tips of his fingers. Fortunately the bantering crowd were wiser than poor Crikey, and treated him so good-humouredly, that he was obliged to vent his rage in anathemas which nearly suffocated him.

The committee showed more wit in their policy. Mr. Tom Chippendale, although professionally employed on the other side, was frequently in close conference with Richard Rawlings. To his sage counsel was to be in part ascribed the remarkable quietude with which the opposition was conducted. There was a reason for this, of which the benighted constituency were profoundly ignorant, little suspecting, while they were displaying their honest patriotism in the streets, that the candidates were playing a private game in their committee-rooms, upon the issue of which, and by no means on the "sweet voices" of the unconscious electors, depended the return of a representative.

In a small room at the top of the house at the Drake's Head, Mr. Tom Chippendale was closeted one morning with Mr. Rawlings.

"We must cover his retreat with some reasonable excuse to the electors," observed Mr. Chippendale; "have you thought of somebody to start in the Liberal interest?"

"I have," replied Rawlings.

"Is he ready?"

"I can't answer for him yet," returned Rawlings; "and before we commit ourselves any further, Mr. Chippendale,

we must have an undertaking from Lord Valteline in writing."

"Utterly impossible," replied Chippendale; "such a thing was never heard of. You must take my word for it that his lordship will resign on the hustings."

"Umph!" returned Rawlings; "no man can answer for slips between the cup and the lip."

"When you have seen as much electioneering as I have," said Mr. Chippendale; "you will acknowledge that you are taking up an untenable position. It would damage him for ever as a public man to give such an undertaking in writing. The arrangement must be strictly secret and confidential, and can be done only by deputy. His lordship cannot appear in it personally."

"And what guarantee am I to have," inquired Rawlings, "that his lordship will carry it out?"

"The best possible guarantee, in the absolute right of sale, which you can enforce within four-and-twenty hours, should his lordship be guilty of the folly and bad faith of driving you to such an extremity. Reflect for a moment on the conditions pending between us. On your part you propose to forego the right of sale for the term of the duration of the next Parliament, provided his lordship will resign in your favour. We, on our part, accept your proposition. Such an arrangement must rest on the honour of the parties on both sides; but as you retain in your hands the power of making ducks and drakes of the title-deeds, if his lordship should fail to complete his part of the contract, it is quite clear you have the best of the bargain."

"I have nothing more," replied Rawlings, "than an advantage of which his lordship cannot deprive me, and which I shall certainly use in case of necessity. Let there be no misunderstanding on this point, Mr. Chippendale. If his lordship should attempt any trick, of which I do not hesitate to say that I believe him thoroughly capable——"

"Pshaw! to be sure he is," interrupted Chippendale; "you don't imagine I rely upon his lordship's honesty. Stuff!—he can't help himself. That makes your speculation safe."

"Well—should he not resign?"

"You will sell, of course. We understand that, my good friend. It is his interest to retire from the contest, as the only means of rescuing his estates from the hammer. But we must give him a decent excuse. If we start a Liberal, his

lordship withdraws on the plea of declining to divide the Conservative interest. Who is your man?"

"Don't you think it would be as well that you and I should know nothing about him?" returned Mr. Rawlings.

"Perhaps so. But can I reckon securely upon him, as we must take our measures accordingly?"

"I think so. Should there be any hitch I will let you know."

"Good. Now, I'm off; and if I don't hear from you, I shall have no occasion to see you till we meet on the hustings. Hurrah! for Rawlings and Independence," cried Mr. Chippendale, in a low humorous voice, as he stealthily crept out, and, gliding down the stairs, retired by the back way through the yard of the inn.

When he was gone, Mr. Rawlings drew a written paper from his pocket, and began to read it attentively. While he was thus engaged, the door opened, and Captain Scott Dingle thrust in his head. He looked taller and thinner than ever, and poised his bamboo with inimitable ease, as usual, in his left hand.

"Do I break in upon you?" cried the captain. "Up to your eyes in business. Shall I look in again?"

"No," replied Rawlings; "come in, and close the door. You got my note?"

"That's what brought me here," returned the captain; "what the deuce is it? What can I do for you? Command me, you know—an idle fellow—my time's my own—at your service all day long, only don't work me too hard. Not quite so young as I was, though there's a spice of the old campaigner left in me yet."

"What I want you to do," said Rawlings, "will not task you very severely. Sit down. I believe you never troubled yourself much about politics, captain?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," replied Dingle, "that sort of thing isn't much in my way. I have been knocking about the world most of my time, you know, and care very little who's in or who's out. One's as good as another, so far as I am concerned."

"Then you are exactly the man we want," returned Rawlings; "all parties are alike to you. Perfectly independent of factious influences, you wouldn't mind straining a point to oblige a friend?"

"Oblige a friend?" answered Dingle; "only show me how I can do it—that's all. I don't care a rush for Whig, Tory,

or Radical. I'm no politician, Rawlings, but I'll tell you what my private opinion is—that it's hang choice between them."

"Well—I'm going to let you into a little secret about the election—but it mustn't go beyond this room."

"On honour!" replied the captain; "I only wish I had a vote—one word for you, two for myself. There's a prejudice against lodgers—can't help that. Go on."

"You know," observed Rawlings, "that Lord Valteline and I start on the Tory interest. Now, it is necessary for special reasons that a candidate should be found on the other side. Do you know such a person?"

"You couldn't apply to a worse quarter," returned the captain; "can't think of anybody. Besides, it's too late in the day now, you know."

"Not at all. Nothing more would be required than to put out an address. Now, I know the man who is exactly qualified, with plenty of idle time, and unfettered by pledges to any party, and you can tell me whether he would be disposed to do it."

"I? Who is he?" inquired the captain.

"Captain Scott Dingle," replied Rawlings.

"What? I set up for Parliament—if you mean that as a joke, Rawlings, I must say it's a signal failure."

"I'm perfectly serious. It shan't cost you sixpence."

"Not likely it should," returned Dingle, with a comical twinkle in his eyes; "for private reasons, which neither you nor I need trouble ourselves with at present. But hang it, Rawlings, explain yourself. What the deuce is it you mean?"

"Simply that you should allow your name to be put to an address, which is here ready drawn up; you will not be required to do anything more; and you will materially serve me without involving yourself in the slightest compromise or responsibility of any kind."

"If you are serious," replied the captain, "it's the strangest business I was ever engaged in in the whole course of my motley career. But stop a moment. Suppose now—I'm only supposing a case—suppose, just for argument's sake—that they were to elect me?"

"Don't alarm yourself," replied Rawlings; "I can promise you beforehand that there isn't the remotest probability of such a thing."

"You're sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"Because, you know, if they should come down upon me for a qualification, it would be rather awkward."

"I will guarantee you against every contingency of the sort. What do you say? Time is precious."

"Say? That I'm afraid I shall make myself look confoundedly ridiculous. But if it will really serve you——"

"Most essentially."

"I don't know what it is," said Dingle; "but there's something about you, Rawlings, that gets over me in a most unaccountable way. I should have as soon expected my bamboo to set up for Parliament. What will everybody say when they see my name stuck upon the walls? Why, I sha'n't be able to show for a month. There's an end to my rounds, that's certain."

"Rounds?" said Rawlings; "you must look to something better than that, captain. A man of your standing ought to have a more profitable occupation; and by putting yourself forward in this way, we can cut out a place for you by-and-by. I shall have it in my own power to help you to it, and I pledge myself——"

"No bribery, Rawlings," returned the captain, looking rather gravely; "I'm sorry you said that. If I am to do this—and I don't half like it—I do it to serve you, although how it is to serve you is an impenetrable mystery to me. If you put it upon any other grounds, you must look elsewhere. I'll give my name cheerfully to oblige a friend—but I'm not the man to sell it for a consideration."

"You will acquit me," replied Rawlings, "of intending what I said in that sense."

"Oh! of course—of course," returned the captain.

"The fact is, it is you who place *me* under an obligation, and I am willing to accept it from you upon no other condition than that you will command me in any way I can serve you in return. You have no objection to that, captain?"

"Not the least in the world," replied the captain; "but I have been so buffeted all my life, and have had so very slender an experience of friendship, and so many hard rubs and disappointments, that I'm callous and indifferent to the future. Hang it! don't let us talk of such things; they only throw me into the blue devils. It's too late for me, Rawlings, to look forward to anything, but dropping down the hill as quietly as I can. There! I've put my autograph to it, and now that I'm going to set up an opposition to you, all I can

say is, that I hope you'll be returned with an overwhelming majority. When it's all over, I'll come and celebrate your victory over a bishop—only, I stipulate that I manufacture it myself. Ragstaffe's a humbug!"

The address was forwarded to the printer, and within an hour the town of Yarlton was apprised that Captain Scott Dingle was in the field on Liberal principles.

It was a busy day with Richard Rawlings. The captain had scarcely left him, when he was surprised by a visit from Mr. Joel Washington Trumbull.

"Well, Mr. Rawlings," said Mr. Trumbull, "I'm in a pretty considerable confusion of ideas about this election. I'm mistaken in you—that's a fact."

"How is that, Mr. Trumbull?" inquired Richard.

"I can't exactly tell how it is," rejoined Mr. Trumbull; "I thought the democratic sentiment was predominant in your mind; but I see that you go a-head in the opposite direction. My notion is, Mr. Rawlings, that you don't very clearly comprehend the eternal principles of liberty and human progress. You're in a regular fix—you are."

"Will you have the goodness," said Richard, "to be a little more explicit?"

"Well, if you'll just give me sea-room, I'll walk unmercifully into your address. You can put out signals of distress if I bear down too hard upon you. First, there's your Conservative principles. I should like to hear an explanation of them. I can't realise them at all, by no stretch of imagination whatever. You come from the everlasting people, and want to hook on to the aristocracy. It won't do at any price. You'll be conclusively smashed between them. Go up a rocket and come down charcoal. That's my fixed belief."

"In this country, Mr. Trumbull," replied Rawlings, "every man is free to embrace the principles he thinks best calculated to promote the general good."

"But if a man holds on to the wrong end of the stick," cried Mr. Turnbull, "he'll be knocked clean off, and no mistake. There'll be an almighty smash by-and-by if your people go on giving up their rights and privileges in this fashion. They'll be stripped to the skin at last, and left like an oyster with the shells off. I'm asking for information, Mr. Rawlings, for I can't see the working of your society by no means, and I want to know what is meant by waiting for reforms to be proved to be necessary. Isn't that rather a piling up of

obstructions for people to break their bones over? Ain't all reforms necessary? Reform is a high-pressure principle that must go forward in spite of wind and tide, and if you keep tossing about looking out for proofs, you'll be run down and go to the bottom like a bit of lead, while the immortal keel of democratic progress is sailing slick into port."

"You deal so figuratively with these matters," observed Rawlings, "that I find it rather difficult to follow you. But the truth is, you must look a little closer into our institutions before you can form a proper judgment of their mutual relations and dependence upon each other."

"I have no fault to find with your institutions," returned Mr. Trumbull, "except that they're all the wrong way—just as if you took a horse to the water and dipped his tail in instead of his head. It occurs to me that if you persist in trying to make a horse drink with his tail, and won't give him water in the natural way, he'll die of thirst some day when you're speculating upon saddling him. That's my private view of the upshot. As to this election, Mr. Rawlings, it's a clear case. The earl has chawed up the electors, and I'll begin to believe that there is such a thing as free representation when I see a man like you staving in the aristocracy, and getting returned to Parliament in spite of them. But that's a total impossibility."

"You think so?"

"It would be just as feasible to lay a trap for a flash of lightning."

"We shall see, Mr. Trumbull," replied Rawlings; "and when we have more time to talk of these things, perhaps you may have occasion to change your opinions. Come on Thursday to the hustings and I'll secure you a seat. You shall see, hear, and judge for yourself. At the present moment I have so much business on hands, that I must postpone the discussion."

Mr. Trumbull was grievously put out by this conversation, and went away more confounded than ever in his speculations upon the British constitution. That day he filled a leaf in his note-book, with an agonising apostrophe to the democratic sentiment, including a dark hint that the elements of English society were on the verge of spontaneous combustion.

The announcement of a new candidate, in the person of Captain Scott Dingle, produced an extraordinary sensation. A small knot of Liberals, who had hitherto looked on in sullen

hopelessness at each returning election, began to brighten up. But who was Captain Scott Dingle? All that was known about him was that he was familiar to the streets of Yarlton, through which he daily careered, balancing a bamboo in his hand. Other qualifications were desirable, they thought, in the man to whom they should give their confidence. What could the Liberal party gain by setting up a candidate whose whereabouts was so exceedingly obscure, and whose personal pretensions were so indefinite? Besides, they had made no preparations, and the failure of this unconcerted attempt to open the borough would only expose their weakness. The result was, that they determined to abandon the captain to his fate. The heads of the party resolved not to go to the poll.

The captain was duly informed of this resolution, and strongly admonished to retire. The dilemma was distressing. He had given himself up as a sacrifice to friendship, and was determined not to flinch, let the consequences be what they might. But although he was resolute on this point, he secretly made up his mind that no earthly temptation should induce him to show himself on the hustings.

Up to the last moment not a hint transpired of the intentions of Lord Valteline. Expectation was afoot with the dawn. The town poured out its palpitating population long before the hour appointed for the nomination; and by the time the proceedings commenced every inch of ground was occupied.

The hustings were erected in the open space of the market-place. On the front of the great booth stood Lord Valteline, Richard Rawlings, and their proposers and seconders; Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe taking up a prominent position in virtue of his former connexion with the borough. Mr. Joel Washington Trumbull was ensconced at the back, watching with intense curiosity the strange spectacle of a popular election in which the people were regularly chawed up and bowled out.

Captain Scott Dingle was duly proposed and seconded. A buzz ran through the crowd. A faint attempt was made to get up a few broken cheers, but they died away, and expired at a distance in a faint "Hoo-oo-rah!" which sounded, we are sorry to say, like a voice of derision.

Then followed the nomination of Richard Rawlings; and when he presented himself to address the electors, he was met by "mingled cheers and hisses." At this crisis Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe interposed to request a patient hearing for the new candidate. A clear stage, and no favour, he declared, was the

boast of Englishmen, at which the crowd set up a more furious yelling than before. "Every man is entitled to a fair hearing," roared out Mr. Ragstaffe, whereupon the mob roared still louder, and Mr. Rawlings was reduced to the necessity of explaining his principles to them in dumb show, after the manner of a pantomime.

At length Lord Valteline signified his intention of addressing them, and a temporary silence was obtained. He had very little to say, and was anxious, for a variety of reasons, to get over the ground as quickly as he could. He told them that the unexpected appearance of a new candidate ("Where is he?" groaned the crowd) had altered the state of the case; that, proud as he would have been to have devoted himself to their service in Parliament, he was advised that a division in the Conservative camp might give a majority to that revolutionary party which, on this occasion, was represented—or, he should say, not represented—by an unknown individual, who was afraid to show himself to the electors—(an observation which was succeeded by a tumultuous uproar of "Bravos!" and "Go it, Valteline!")—and that, under the circumstances—under the peculiar circumstances, he repeated, circumstances which—(the rest of the sentence was drowned in shouts and cat-calls, to the infinite vexation of Mr. Washington Trumbull, who was particularly anxious to know what the circumstances were.) He therefore called upon them to follow his example, and give their undivided support to Mr. Rawlings, rather than let the enemy steal a march on them. ("Hurrah!" "Rawlings for ever!") He had no personal animosity to that gentleman; he only hoped he would stick to his principles: and, for his own part, he could only say that he would take another opportunity—(here he was cut short again by the miscellaneous and somewhat contradictory cries of the multitude, who by this time were getting rather mystified). "Therefore," he added, "immolating personal ambition on the altar of public principle, I retire from the contest, and shall cheerfully give the whole of my influence to that candidate, be he who or what he may, who pledges himself to nail his colours to the mast!" This last sentence was appallingly triumphant; it ran like an electric shock through the mass of upturned faces; and when a show of hands was called for, a forest of brawny fingers sprang into the air for Rawlings.

The proposer of Captain Scott Dingle now stepped forward. He said that his friend was too good a patriot to expose the

town to the horrors of a contest, which, from the exhibition he had just witnessed, could end only in the discomfiture of the principles he espoused. He would, therefore, prove to them the purity of his sentiments by sacrificing the wish dearest to his heart, and resigning his pretensions for the present. But, he observed, a time was coming when, regardless of expense and personal inconvenience, his honourable friend, Captain Scott Dingle, would be ready to vindicate the independence of the borough, and when that time came, he would be found at his post. This observation produced an unfortunate effect upon the audience, who, breaking in upon the speech, set up a chorus of howls and hisses, intermingled with cries of "Bah !" "Oh !" "Where is he ?" "Why doesn't he show ?" and other base insinuations injurious to the honour of the captain.

Richard Rawlings was now member of Parliament for Yarlton. The duties which this new position imposed upon him demanded a sweeping change in his domestic arrangements. It would be necessary to reside in London the greater part of the year ; the old house in the country was to be given up ; and a suitable mansion, in which he could work out the ambitious schemes he had formed, must be taken in the metropolis. Farewell to the tranquil fishing-town. The hand of Time, and the hearts of Clara and Margaret, thrilling with vague sensations and youthful desires, point to London, henceforth the scene of whatever joys or sorrows are to be unfolded in this history.

BOOK THE THIRD.

WEALTH MAKES WORSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINING THE ADVENTURES OF A LADY OF TITLE.

TOWARDS the centre of that straggling line of fine mansions called Park-lane, there is one house presenting so peculiar a *façade* that everybody familiar with the place must have a distinct recollection of it. A house that challenges special notice in this locality may be presumed to be somewhat re-

markable in its style of architecture, for of all the fantastical clusters of the far west of London, Park-lane is the most singularly diversified in the character of its structures. Every house is built after a plan of its own : one looks in, another looks out ; one is tall, another broad ; and they are so irregular in height and outline that they seem as if they were all getting up out of bed at different hours in the morning, some not being yet quite up, while others are yawning and stretching themselves.

The particular house to which we allude is built in the form of a series of semicircles, like so many towers cut in two and clasped round by a lofty balcony, whose trellis-work ascends nearly to the roof. The windows are draped with magnificent damask, costly plants grace the balcony, and a tone of high comfort and embellishment pervades the whole establishment.

The interior is gorgeous. We will beg of the reader, however, to furnish it after his own fashion. Let him choose his own chintz, his own ormolu, chandeliers, and mirrors, and crowd the stairs to the top with liveried lacqueys. He will do it better than we can. We should only weaken the general effect by getting up an inventory out of the great upholstery establishments of the West End. But in order that he may be enabled to do proper justice to the furniture and decorations, he must be apprised that the first artists were employed, and that the expenditure was worthy of a palace.

Great ends demand great means ; and the splendours of this house in Park-lane must be regarded as a part of the machinery by which stupendous ulterior projects were to be accomplished. It was a season of gigantic bubbles, and the Priests of the mystery required grand Temples for the performance of their rites.

Looking back calmly upon the extraordinary revolutions of fortune that occur in moments of popular excitement, we are apt to treat the most literal picture of them with incredulity. When the collapse sets in, men find it so difficult to live by the most patient and watchful industry, they find the struggle so severe and the results so doubtful or inadequate, that they can hardly bring themselves to believe in the miracles worked by individuals during a period of frenzy and delusion. But the said miracles become intelligible, if we bear in mind that it is not so much by any power inherent in himself that the magician works, as by the ductility of that material of gaping

credulity upon which he operates. No man, by the mere force of his own genius, could effect revolutions of this description in society, if society did not place the divining rod in his hands, and voluntarily prostrate itself before the sorcery by which it is first dazzled and then duped.

The fame of Richard Rawlings' railway speculations preceded him to the metropolis. Railways at that moment occupied more attention than any other topic, foreign or domestic, that was before the country, because everybody hoped to make money by them. A collegiate education, and the advantages of birth or fortune, which commonly facilitate the progress of a man in Parliament, were not necessary in railway legislation. Business habits, and a practical knowledge of the subject, were infinitely more important. This was fortunate for Richard Rawlings. Had he gone into Parliament in ordinary times, the chances of acquiring distinction would have been as much against him as they were then in his favour. He entered the House of Commons as a great authority on the paramount question of the day, and his appearance at the table to take the oaths produced so marked a "sensation," that the members stretched out their heads on all sides to look at him. He was at once invested with a sort of appellate jurisdiction upon railway matters, and as his influence increased in the House, it extended a hundred-fold out of doors. Railway-boards scrambled to get hold of him; all the engines of intrigue were put in motion to secure his alliance, or propitiate his favour; and irresistible temptations in the way of allocated shares, patronage, and pickings, were tendered to lure him into the directories. His name was a tower of strength, and wherever it appeared the shares were instantly quoted at a premium, which made the grovelling world at his feet look up to him with a feeling of confidence, not such as men repose in the known and tested powers of their fellow-men, but such as a slavish superstition accords to Juggernaut or Joss.

The stakes in this fierce game rose with the excitement. Where Richard Rawlings had formerly played for hundreds, he now played for tens of thousands. Large funds were under his control, and at his own irresponsible disposal. Nobody questioned his sagacity or integrity. Whatever he touched turned to profit, and the mines of wealth he ploughed seemed illimitable and inexhaustible.

The change in the life of Mrs. Rawlings was like that of a

person who, falling asleep in a hovel, dreams of golden palaces and ambrosial feasts; or, like the conjuration of the last scene in a pantomime, when the stage, suddenly illuminated, discovers the Temple of the Fairy Queen, or the abode of some beneficent genius in the "Realms of Bliss." The last scene! Ah! if it were the last! Alack, and well-a-day! human life is not a pantomime in which, after a good deal of hard knocking about, we have the power to wind up in a blaze of rosy light, making our exit pirouetting on a cloud. Mrs. Rawlings, however, never troubled herself about such considerations; and as she stepped her costly chambers in Indian silks that filled the air with rustling music, and sunned herself in the surrounding mirrors, she might be excused if she gave way at first to a little womanly exultation. Her pulses fluttered wildly in her new cage, and for a time she was lost in wonder and admiration. But it is astonishing how soon we become reconciled to prosperity, and how readily we fall into the ways of the great world, however indifferently nature or education may have fitted us to grace or enjoy them. The fashionable homage that was paid to Mrs. Rawlings gave her a *prestige* in society which, whatever might have been the estimate put upon it by the circles that pressed round her, was prized by the lady herself as the guarantee of a position as real and solid as if she had been born to the honours which venality and sordid flattery persisted in heaping upon her.

There was not an hour in the day unoccupied. Visits, exhibitions, public meetings, *soirées*, and dinners, filled up the round of her laborious existence. She was whirled into these busy scenes she hardly knew how, and they succeeded each other so quickly, and her engagements were so numerous and urgent, that, even had she been conscious how indifferently her previous habits had prepared her for the discharge of such brilliant functions, she really never had leisure to reflect upon the matter. The worst of it was, that she was always in a flurry, and expended a great deal more animal spirits than her occasions required. She had not yet learned the economy of repose; and it was prophesied by her new acquaintances that she would break up at the end of her first season. She did not break up for all that; but rather seemed to rebound from her exertions with increased elasticity. She had found at last the kind of life—light, sprightly, and transitory—which exactly agreed with her desires and her constitution.

Clara attracted universal admiration. Her beauty and

vivacity would have drawn the eyes of the crowd upon her under any circumstances; but the reputation of a large fortune rendered her the object of closer and more eager attentions. The number of lounging cadets who followed her wherever she went, was quite oppressive; and if she had not had a natural genius for variety, her gay life must have run a great risk of being nipped in the bud. The art with which she baffled their addresses was derived direct from nature, which, in lieu of the sense that enables men (when they happen to be endowed with it) to select and secure their advantages, supplies women with a tact or instinct that often answers the purpose better.

Running the gauntlet of a mob of admirers, Clara escaped without a wound. Sometimes, in a pensive moment, on her return from a ball, or a dinner, or a long dull *séance* of political and literary people, with troops of images flitting through her brain, she might have fancied that some one had made an impression upon her, and thus have gone to sleep in a state of palpitating confusion. But when she awoke in the morning she was calm and clear. There was not a tinge of romantic sentiment in her nature. She took pleasure as it came on the surface, and accepted it only at its fugitive value. It never occurred to her to make a phantasy of love to herself by imagining a feeling that had not reached her heart. She wisely waited for the reality.

The bustle and incessant motion were more fatiguing than agreeable to Margaret. In the midst of the glitter, she always suggested the notion of a person whose thoughts were elsewhere, and who was longing for solitude and green fields. Her soul looked out of her eyes yearningly for a sympathy which she could nowhere find in hot and crowded rooms; and the chief amusement she seemed to extract from the thronged panorama was to watch and speculate upon its shifting phases. But she was rarely suffered to indulge her inclinations in this way. The more she retreated from indiscriminate flattery, the more she was followed. Like her sister, she had her circle of slaves, but it was less numerous and rather more select, for the approaches were not so broad and open, nor the deity within so liberal of her fascinations.

Amongst the multitude who were most assiduous in their visits at Park-lane, was a lady who made some show in the fashionable world, although her pretensions were considered a little ambiguous. The history of the Baroness de Poudre-

bleu furnished an episode in the small talk of the coteries that never failed to elicit detractive witticisms. But as we see no reason why we should make a mystery about a handsome woman of a certain age, who was quite as good as her neighbours, we will relate all the facts we have been able to collect concerning her antecedents.

The Baroness was not a foreigner, as her title seemed to imply, but true English flesh and blood. Had she been of a mythological descent, there could not have been more contradictory accounts of her origin than were circulated by her intimate friends. They agreed only on one fact, that in her youth she was distinguished by a commanding figure and a lofty cast of beauty, and that from the outset she manifested a corresponding scorn for people of her own rank (whatever it was), and a profound admiration of the ranks above her. Opportunity, which makes heroes of men, and, sometimes, martyrs of women, favoured her ambition.

The Honourable Colonel Bulkeley Smirke was heir presumptive to the title of his brother, Lord Huxley. His lordship's constitution was broken up—the colonel was lusty, active, and ten years younger: and there being cogent reasons, it was said, why his lordship would not, or could not, marry, the colonel's accession to the peerage was looked upon as a certainty. The young beauty took these circumstances into consideration. The colonel was a high-bred man, with a loose and dangerous reputation; and if she had been influenced by views of a domestic nature—such as sitting down with a husband in a home consecrated to the household gods—he was the last man in the world she would have chosen. But it was not the colonel she wanted to marry, nor household gods she yearned for; she wanted to marry the Huxley title by proxy, and she yearned only for a fashionable career. A beautiful woman with a strong will can do anything she likes. The colonel, in his own opinion, had exhausted the sex, and was proof against their arts. But, like thousands of experienced gentlemen, he was brought down by a dart feathered from his own plumage. He relied upon his knowledge of women—so did the lady. He believed that his knowledge was complete at all points—she knew that it was shallow and delusive, and she played upon it like a sharper who loses a few tricks in the beginning to lure on his antagonist. At first she tantalised him with fits of indifference that piqued his vanity. Then she awakened his jealousy. The strategy was so perfect that

he took to himself the whole merit of an imaginary conquest over her heart. He carried her off triumphantly, as he believed, from a host of baffled rivals, but not till he had secured her a little pin-money to the tune of seven or eight hundred a year.

Her subsequent introduction to the London circles as the Honourable Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was highly satisfactory. Whatever the ladies may have thought of her, the gentlemen at least acknowledged the supremacy of her charms and the finished graces of her manner. Circumstances shaped themselves felicitously to the mode of life she panted for. After a few weeks of dalliance the colonel took to his clubs and his horses again, and left his wife to the free indulgence of her own desires in a fashionable house, where she entertained whom, how, and when she pleased. This delicious existence lasted through two seasons. Then came a sudden break-up, which fell upon her without a moment's warning. One night, coming home from a brilliant party, she found a note from the colonel on her toilette-table. It conveyed in a few hurried words the astounding intelligence that her husband had that night started for the Continent—that his affairs were deeply involved—that he had left instructions to sell off the house and furniture without an hour's delay—and that she was to collect whatever she could out of the wreck, and follow him to Paris. Upon reading this brief scrawl, evidently written in a state of frightful agitation, Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke uttered a low cry, but remembering that her maid was in the room, she crushed up the note in her hand, and, with inimitable composure, proceeded to disrobe. Her brain was full of expedients. Her self-possession never forsook her. She saw the gulf before her, although she could not measure its sightless depth, and she made up her mind at once. Dismissing her maid for the night, she devoted the whole of the miserable hours till daybreak in collecting her jewels, and all the portable articles of value she could carry off without observation. It was her last night in England. Her scheme of life was blasted. Nothing remained of all that flaunting luxury, but the glittering fragments. Yet she did not despair. Early the next morning, after converting into money everything that was available, she despatched a few gay notes announcing that she was going on a tour, which she described as quite an impromptu affair. By this bright little artifice she hoped to cover her retreat, and, at all events, secure the first version of her disgrace. That night

she set her face towards Dover, and in two days she joined her husband in Paris.

Matters were worse than she had anticipated. The colonel, devoured by a passion for dice, and relying confidently upon the Huxley estates in prospect, had sold himself and all his hopes to the Jews. This was nothing; for the Jews would have waited patiently enough if a circumstance had not happened that filled them with dismay. It transpired, all of a sudden, that Lord Huxley had taken it into his head to marry. Then the storm burst. It was all over with the colonel. Judgment-debts, warrants, and personal securities leaped out of the desks of usurers and attorneys, and the colonel fled. All that was left to the Honourable Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was the beggarly pin-money. One faint ray of hope, however, fell on her in the midst of the desolation. She had a son—the only issue of that happy union—called after his father, and inheriting the beauty of his mother. As yet he was the heir presumptive; and as there was no great likelihood of any obstacle to his succession arising from the marriage of a shattered old lord, Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke lived on in that hope, and dedicated herself, with unremitting maternal solicitude, to the care of her boy.

A residence in Paris was out of the question. It would have brought them under the scrutiny of too many old acquaintances, so they adjourned to the German baths, and, moving about from place to place, made the best of their stinted resources. The colonel became an *habitué* of the rouge-et-noir tables, and the lady managed to keep up her spirits, and gather a circle of admirers about her wherever she went. It was whispered that she turned her fascinations to a profitable account, and played herself occasionally with rich “fellows,” who were not unwilling to lose money to her. But we give no credit to such scandals.

After economising for a whole month in the cheap valleys of Switzerland—a period of dismal quarantine to the colonel—they made their way into Italy, and settled at Florence. The climax of Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke’s misfortunes was now approaching. One morning they received a letter from England, accompanied by a newspaper. The conjunction was ominous. Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke opened the paper first, and, with a presentiment of calamity, flew at once to the “Births.” There she found the terrible announcement, confirmed by the letter, that Lady Huxley had presented her husband with a son.

Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke at that time wore her dark hair in long masses that swept her fine shoulders in a bewildering fall. No woman better understood the enchantments of premeditated disorder in the disposition of her silken meshes. She was a consummate mistress of effect, and suffered no opportunity of making a picture to escape. The fatal discovery which blasted all her ambitious hopes suggested an irresistible stage "situation;" and certainly our accomplished actress never looked more captivating than when she flung back her hair with a wild toss of her head, leaving a few tresses wandering over her bosom, and then, turning suddenly round, looked at her husband with a frantic smile. It was difficult to believe that the vermilion dew which lay upon her parted lips sprang from real agony; but the agony was real, nevertheless.

The worst was now known. The boy Bulkeley was doomed to be plain Bulkeley for the rest of his days; and as the colonel could never re-appear in England, the only prospect that lay before them was permanent banishment, relieved by affectionate messages from home in the shape of outlawries. Loosened from all responsibility to society, and mingling with a floating population of fashionable outcasts like himself, the colonel sought oblivion, where only such men can find it, in a life of dissipation and profligacy. The sequel may be soon told. Excesses of all kinds did their work upon him, and he sank under them at last. At the end of a few years, the Hon. Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke was a widow.

It is astonishing what wear and tear and mental tortures women of the world pass through and conceal in their time, surviving in the full bloom of their spirits, and looking as angelical as if they had led the lives of Sybarites, instead of having been dragged to pieces by private horrors. No bird of Paradise could have been more radiant than Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke when the short period of mourning was over. She breathed a freer atmosphere than ever. If she was not quite so young as when she had left London, her beauty was more developed, and her knowledge of life more matured. But she shrank from the humiliation of coming back a nominal Smirke, disowned, as she was sure to be, by the head of that noble family. Revolving this point of personal dignity over and over again in her mind, she hit upon the ingenious idea of sinking Smirke altogether, and taking up a foreign title, which would enable her to cast a veil over the past, and to re-enter the world with *éclat*. During these years of struggle and wandering,

she had, by means best known to herself, contrived to save a little money; and as the Duke of Tuscany was always in want of funds for a new road, or an old charity, or something else, and was always glad to get a respectable offer for a patent of nobility, there was no difficulty in bringing this desirable matter to bear. The bargain was struck accordingly, the patent made out, and one elastic spring morning Mrs. Bulkeley Smirke made her second *avatar* in Mayfair under the style and title of the Baroness de Poudre-bleu.

Her income, it must be confessed, was painfully small; but expending nearly the whole of it upon appearances, and living upon little or nothing, the mystery was not so wonderful as some people pretended to think. Out of seven or eight hundred a year, it is just possible to job a small carriage, to rent a small house, and to keep a couple of livery servants on board wages, if the proprietor of this surface splendour be content to feed upon air. The Baroness de Poudre-bleu went out into a great deal of high company; but that cost her nothing. She was not expected to give dinner parties, and a supperless *soirée* or two in the season discharged all her obligations to the wide circle in which she moved. Her chief luxuries and heaviest expenditure were a charming little residence and a tiny carriage; but she knew the exact extent of these charges, and met them by a strict, pinching economy in everything else. Costume was a terrible item, for she dressed magnificently; but then her own maid was a French milliner, who helped her to the fashions at half-price; so that, one way and another, she made a handsome show, like the butterflies, with very little substance beneath.

Being unable, however, to produce much effect by the costliness of her appointments, she had recourse to a cheaper and more startling mode of notoriety. She published a novel. It was called "Agatha; or, the Bride of the Barricades: a Story of the Revolution." Revolutions were fashionable at that time, and the book had an extensive circulation amongst the author's acquaintances, to each of whom she sent a copy with her autograph. The distinction she obtained by this work amongst crowds of people who never read a line of it, was flattering to her ambition. Everybody assured her that "Agatha" was *the* book of the season; and her friend, Mr. Trainer, who was a regular author, and was supposed to hold some misty relations with the newspaper press, declared that, in his time, no book had been so unanimously praised by the reviewers.

This literary exploit gave a decided piquancy to her social reputation. She was somebody, over and above being still a fine woman and a person of fashion. In her conversation she rather eschewed literature, and talked of the book as a whim thrown off to please her fancy, and not as writers, to whom authorship is a work of love or labour, usually talk of their productions. In fact, whenever she did speak of literature, it was with the modesty and reserve of one who possessed great powers in that way, and had the good taste not to crush other people by the display of them. Whenever there were authors of any note present, she made it a point to avoid them. A little literary fame was all very well as a graceful adjunct to fashionable celebrity; but she would not suffer it on any account to be supposed that it was the special distinction she coveted.

Master Poudre-bleu—we beg pardon, Mr. Bulkeley Smirke—was now about one or two and twenty years of age. This young gentleman having been educated abroad, had foreign manners, if we may so describe his languid and elegant style; spoke English with a lisping, exotic accent; and being very pale and handsome, like his mother, was rather *distingué* in appearance. The course of education from which he had just graduated gave him a signal advantage over his English contemporaries. He had seen more of the mean and vicious side of society than any of them, and had already arrived at certain conclusions concerning human life, which rendered it exceedingly improbable that he should ever fall a sacrifice to his sensibilities. He had seen, indeed, so much which it might have been as well he had not seen—that his juvenile faith in virtue of all kinds was fairly extinguished. In his own small indolent way he was a sort of social atheist, and his conversation was coloured throughout by that general scepticism which sets up the kind of pretty paradoxes which young ladies, who are not embarrassed by ideas, love to argue about. He had the aspect of a youth who had worn out his enthusiasm, if he ever had any, and exhausted his interest in life, before he had begun to live.

The grand object of his mother's existence was to quarter this young gentleman upon some rich family. He had nothing to look forward to but a wife with money. This was the only thing in the world he was fit for. His education had taken no determinate direction. He had no practical acquisitions of any earthly description. He did not know

how to do anything ; and his white hands were as useless as his unbelieving head. No human being could be better qualified for the destiny his mother marked out for him.

When the Baroness de Poudre-bleu made the acquaintance of the Rawlingses at the house of her friend, Lady Twistle-ton, the wife of the wealthy loan-contractor, she saw at a glance that they were the very stock set apart by nature for her maternal design. They possessed all the characteristics of people who come into the great world predestined to be victimised ; they were ignorant of its ways and wiles, easily won by attentions, and inordinately rich. The baroness, therefore, sat down to a regular siege of the Rawlingses. She charmed Mrs. Rawlings with her affability and good nature ; and showered such constant and affectionate kindnesses upon the girls, that the grateful little souls fell quite in love with her. Indeed, the ladies became at last absolutely inseparable. The baroness was regarded by them all as the most gracious and unaffectedly charming woman in the world.

In the confidence she thus won, and the ascendancy she thus secured, the baroness laid the roots of a matrimonial tree which was to bear golden fruit for her darling Bulkeley. She studied the characters of the two girls with diligence and penetration before she made up her mind which of them she should select as the future wife of her son ; and after long and grave consideration her choice fell upon Margaret.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INVITED TO A BALL IN PARK-LANE.

MR. RAWLINGS' first session passed off triumphantly. He carried his bill for the railroad, and appointed Mr. John Peabody secretary. Nor, in the flood-tide of prosperity did he forget his friend, Captain Scott Dingle, to whom he allotted one hundred and fifty shares ; advising him, at the same time, not to lose a moment in coming up to London, as he had other objects in view for him. Dingle knew nothing about business, and never having had an opportunity of enjoying the luxury of a little superfluous cash, was in the habit of looking upon riches as an allegory. If ever, at any period of his life, he had indulged in the thought that it was possible he might, by some extraordinary chance, come into a trifle of money, over and above his actual necessities, it was only as

men dream over the fire in their wintry solitude, building castles in the air, and blowing them away again. These delusions had long since vanished. The door of hope, which had never been very hospitable to him, was closed, and barred, and bolted in his face. It never even occurred to him to knock at it, for he was quite sure it wouldn't be opened. When, therefore, he received an unexpected summons from Mr. Rawlings, accompanied by a letter of allotment, which, at that moment, was actually worth several hundred pounds, he could hardly trust to the evidence of his senses. But the document admitted of no doubt. He did not understand it in the least; but his confidence in Rawlings was unlimited; and, without stopping to reflect upon his good fortune, and, if the truth must be confessed, hardly believing in it, he hastened up to London. He was received in Park-lane with cordiality; but Rawlings was so much occupied, that the first interview did not last ten minutes. Enough transpired, however, to awaken a delirious sensation of delight in the captain's mind, who, lifted out of a state of total stagnation, found himself all at once pitched into a whirl of prosperous activity. As he had formerly felt a secret conviction that if it were to rain bank-notes not one of them would drop upon his path; so, in his present ecstasy, he believed that should such a shower fall, the wind would blow every particle of it straight into his pockets. Rawlings, it appeared, had not only secured him the shares, but had put down his name on the committee; and Dingle had scarcely been a fortnight in London, when he had the intense satisfaction of figuring in a similar capacity in half-a-dozen lines. Many people asked who Captain Scott Dingle was; but it was a sufficient answer to all inquiries that he was a friend of the member for Yarlton. Dingle's fortune was made. He could see no end to the riches that were minting for him by the benevolent genii in Moorgate-street, who were about this time clustered thickly on a spot destined to become famous in the annals of Bubble-dom. Money, hitherto a myth, was now a reality to the captain. The long-suppressed aspirations of the gentleman had vent at last. The style of the outer man underwent a visible and important change. His mustaches were carefully oiled; he mounted a handsome open blue waistcoat, with military buttons, and just such coats, pantaloons, and boots, as became a dashing military man of a certain age. He looked almost handsome, and certainly very airy and gallant, when

he stepped of a morning out of Feuillade's Hotel, in the Opera Colonnade, and glanced up and down the street, with a roguish sparkle in his eyes, as if he had come out to make conquests of all the women. It was a sight worth going a long way to see, he looked so happy and assured, as he stood pulling on his kid gloves in the most leisurely manner, and swinging his faithful bamboo, like one who had nothing in the world to think about but pleasure. Ah! that was a charming episode in the life of Captain Scott Dingle.

There was a crowded assembly at Park-lane, in the house of Richard Rawlings, Esq., M.P. The report of the entertainment which appeared the next day in the *Morning Post*, displayed a galaxy of great names, including Lord Fiddlesby, who had just returned from an embassy at St. Petersburg, and was the diplomatic lion of the hour; Lord Charles Eton, a young politician of great promise, who had been selected this session to second the address in the House of Commons; Sir Peter Jinks, the bank director; the Countess of Rakely, the Ladies Amelia and Clemence Rosherville, and a crowd of other people of mark and distinction.

All the rooms were thrown open, and the crush was so great in the apartment devoted to quadrilles and waltzes, that the dancers were shut up in little rings, with hardly space enough to poise themselves to the time of the music. The pursuit of dancing under difficulties is a lugubrious pleasure, and to judge from the solemn faces of the young people who dedicate themselves to this amusement, a looker-on, ignorant of the gravity that lies at the bottom of our enjoyments, might suppose that they were performing some kind of painful sacrificial rite.

In the course of the evening the Baroness de Poudre-bleu managed to engage Margaret to her son for a waltz and a quadrille. The waltz was just over, and Mr. Bulkeley Smirke conducted his partner to a seat close to his mother. As a matter of course, the conversation ran upon the heat of the room. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke thought it stifling. He had by no means made up his mind on the general question of dancing. What possible pleasure could there be in making oneself so intolerably hot? Would Miss Rawlings take an ice. Margaret declined.

"You have all the world here to-night, Miss Rawlings," drawled out Mr. Bulkeley Smirke. "Who is that man talking to your father?"

Margaret looked in the direction indicated. The gentleman

with whom her father was engaged in conversation was of the middle size, young, with a severe and thoughtful expression of face, large dark eyes, and a slight stoop in the shoulders. She did not know him; and in the next minute they had both moved away. The baroness thought it a good opportunity to get up a little flirtation between Bulkeley and Margaret.

"Who is she like?" said the baroness, with a bewitching smile, taking up Margaret's small white hand, and looking lovingly in her face. "Now, think, Bulkeley. Do you remember anybody she resembles?" Margaret felt herself glowing over with blushes; and if she resembled anybody at that moment it must have been somebody with very crimson cheeks.

"Like?" returned Bulkeley, "you don't mean *Made-moiselle Fenestre*?"

"My dear, how could you commit such a blunder? You recollect the Princess Luigi? Now, look at her eyes,—do you detect the likeness?"

"Perhaps there is something in the expression," replied Bulkeley.

"Only, my love, you are so much younger and fairer, I declare, at a little distance, I might have almost mistaken you for her."

"Am I so like her?" said Margaret. "Who was she?"

"Oh! the Princess Luigi," said the baroness; "she was the niece of the Cardinal Ambroccini, and connected with some high families in Tuscany, where I met her. She was perfectly lovely, and, do you know, she took such a fancy to Bulkeley, that she quite spoiled him. Young as he was, I was afraid he would leave his heart behind him. And then you are solike her!"

This was pretty broad. Margaret felt her ears tingling, although she did not interpret the compliment exactly in the way it was meant. She was confused at being thought so very like the beautiful Princess Luigi; but it never occurred to her that the baroness intended to carry the analogy any farther. As for Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, he bore the infliction of an allusion to his heart with imperturbable coolness. Understanding clearly the drift of his mother, whose diplomatic talents he held in the greatest respect, he contented himself with an indolent stare at Margaret, waiting to hear what she would say. He was one of those young gentlemen who treat very young ladies with a patronising air, and loll on cushions expecting to be wooed. The only women he con-

sidered it worth his while to take any trouble about were women much older than himself. In short, Mr. Bulkeley Smirke despised girls, and affected the society of married women, who alone possessed the power of exciting his attention. But he was wide awake, nevertheless, to the importance of a *mariage de convenance*. He had been carefully educated up to that point, and every symptom of taste, feeling, or inclination that might interfere with it was sedulously subdued. Never was twig more vigilantly bent, and never did tree grow more obediently to the hand that trained it. Notwithstanding that apathy of manner which was habitual to him, he had made up his mind about Margaret Rawlings. The only difference that arose between him and his mother, in their private conferences on the subject, referred to the mode of proceeding. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was confident of success, without thinking much pains necessary to secure it; while the baroness, who had studied the whole family industriously, saw difficulties in the way which demanded the nicest management and discretion.

Margaret had not the slightest suspicion of the net that was weaving round her; and when Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, following up the delicate flattery of his mother, begged of her not to believe that his heart had ever been touched by the Princess Luigi, she took him at his word with a simple quietness that confounded him. He expected the innuendo would be caught up, and was prepared for a counter-play of bantering which might lead him indirectly to his object. But Margaret had no relish for idle foppery about hearts; and, of all persons, thought that Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was the very last who ought to be permitted to trifle on such subjects. There was a serious enthusiasm in her nature which might have been easily awakened; but not by Mr. Bulkeley Smirke.

"I suppose, Miss Rawlings," lisped the young gentleman, "you think I have no heart."

"Indeed," returned Margaret, "I never thought about it."

"Really, that's very severe of you."

"Severe?"

"The fact is, I didn't believe in such a thing myself, until"—and he stopped short, twirling his glove with one hand, and adjusting his collar with the other.

"Rather an ominous pause, my dear," exclaimed the baroness; "you are bound to finish the sentence, or Miss Rawlings will fancy you're a universal lover."

"Well, I was going to say something that would prove to Miss Rawlings that I am the most devoted fellow in the world."

"I beg," said Margaret, "you will not take the trouble to prove anything of the kind. The baroness is only jesting. See, they're getting up another quadrille."

"I shall not dance the next quadrille," said Bulkeley.

"You're shockingly cruel upon poor Bulkeley," observed the baroness; "you really ought to let him explain himself."

"Exactly," said Bulkeley, looking with a vacant expression at Margaret, "exactly so; only let me explain myself."

"But there's nothing to explain," returned Margaret.

At this moment Mr. Rawlings came up, accompanied by the gentleman with whom he had been recently engaged in conversation. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, in the hope of piquing Margaret, looked in another direction.

"Lord Charles Eton, my dear," said Mr. Rawlings, "has requested me to introduce him to you for the next quadrille. My daughter, Miss Margaret Rawlings."

Lord Charles made a slight, but graceful inclination of his head, and offered his arm to Margaret. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke looked as black as thunder, and was on the point of saying that the lady was engaged to him—for the petted boy had a right royal temper,—when his mother put her hand on his arm, and whispered, "Don't be a fool, Bulkeley. You said you would not dance the next quadrille." By the time this action was over, Lord Charles Eton and Margaret Rawlings were swept into one of the little rings in the centre of the room.

Margaret was conscious of a slight trepidation as she rose to take her partner's arm. The gravity and earnestness of his manner, with the full light of his clear dark eyes falling upon her, had something to do with it; but that was not all. She had often heard of Lord Charles Eton, but had fancied him a different sort of man. He had gained first-class honours at Oxford, where Henry Winston, who was his junior by several years, had formed his acquaintance, and been so captivated by his talents, that, with characteristic ardour, he prophesied a distinguished career for the incipient senator. Lord Charles had been trained from the beginning for public life, had already won a high reputation for eloquence, and added to his severer acquirements the graces of liberal scholarship. His refined and fastidious taste was displayed in a volume of lyrical poems, which he published before he left college; and

his literary ambition had subsequently taken a loftier flight in an historical work, which was less remarkable for brilliancy of treatment, than for perspicuity and research. The impression he made upon his contemporaries was that of a man of sound judgment, comprehensive powers, and inflexible integrity. Margaret was a little timid at first, but the suavity and gentleness of his manner very soon put her at her ease; and she was not slow to discover that the rising statesman of the day could be as agreeable in the ball-room as he was influential in the senate.

While they are engaged in the quadrille, we will take a turn in one of the adjoining apartments. Here we recognise some old acquaintances. Captain Scott Dingle is lounging over the back of a chair, chatting negligently with Mrs. Rawlings. The last few years have wrought an alteration in him; but he dresses up wonderfully for candle-light. His hair is thinner than it used to be, and nearly grey; but his mustaches still keep their dark hue, and, by the force of contrast, look more fierce than ever.

"Magnificent, 'pon my life!" whispered the captain; "everything in such capital taste. Does you a world of credit, Mrs. Rawlings."

"Oh! don't give me any credit, my dear captain," said Mrs. Rawlings; "you don't suppose I attend to these things? Bless you, it's all Gunter," she added, laughing, in a low whisper, extending a broad gilt fan between her face and the company. "That's the way we manage in London. Just throw your eye over the waiters when you go down to supper. As I say to Rawlings, money will do anything in London."

"I hope I have the honour of seeing Mrs. Rawlings quite well?" said a sleek-looking gentleman, with a round hat under his arm, addressing Mrs. Rawlings.

"Ah! how do ye do—how do ye do, Mr. Trumbull?" returned Mrs. Rawlings; "you're a sad man to come so late. Why are you not dancing? I thought all you American gentlemen were fond of dancing."

"That's rather hard upon my country, ma'am," replied Mr. Trumbull; "certainly there are some people in America who do dance, for it's a vast surface of earth, that eternal continent of ours, and reckons an uncommon population of heterogeneous souls; but the people of the United States, Mrs. Rawlings, are too busy with their heads to have much time for their heels—that's a fact. Captain Dingle! Glad

to meet you again, sir ; never saw you since that remarkable demonstration of democratic sentiment at Yarlton. I should esteem it a great privilege to be present the next time you set up for Parliament."

"Very obliging in you, Mr. Trumbull," returned the captain, looking a little angry ; "but I haven't the slightest intention of gratifying your curiosity."

"Well," replied Mr. Trumbull, "there's some sense in that. I read your address, captain, and look upon you to be a regular go-ahead Republican, and no mistake ; but your politics won't go down at Yarlton—that's my candid opinion."

Captain Scott Dingle was awfully outraged at this allusion to his politics. If ever there was a man who cordially hated politics it was Captain Scott Dingle. He had hoped that that unfortunate incident in his life, in which he had suffered himself to be put forward as a victim to oblige his friend was, by this time, buried in oblivion ; but here was a man, rising up like an avenging spirit, to remind him of it at a moment when he was in the full flow of enjoyment ; and he felt as if he were doomed to be dogged all his life by that one criminating fact. A Republican ! His blood leaped into his ears, and he could have chastised Trumbull on the spot. To make the matter worse, there was a cynical-looking man standing close to them, and listening to the conversation with, as Dingle thought, a supercilious leer on his face. Dingle resolved that that man, whoever he was, should not go away with the notion that he was a Republican.

"Sir," said Dingle, looking Trumbull straight in the face, "I repudiate. You understand that word, I believe, at the other side of the water—*repudiate*. You've made an egregious mistake in calling me a Republican ; and, more than that, I don't think you'll find such an animal in all England."

The captain drew up like a conqueror ; the cynical-looking man smiled, and Mr. Trumbull opened his mouth wide with a gasp of astonishment.

"You're a real lightning-conductor, captain—you are !" returned Trumbull.

"I may be a lightning-conductor," replied the captain, "but I'm not a Republican."

Trumbull was going to say something, but the captain turned his head away, plainly indicating that he was determined to have nothing more to do with him.

"Ah ! Sir Peter," cried Mrs. Rawlings ; "glad to see you."

I have been looking for Lady Jinks everywhere. What have you done with her?"

"Left her," replied the cynical-looking man, "in a profound discussion with Mr. Trainer on the Baroness de Poudre-bleu's wonderful novel." Then, stooping his head, he inquired, in a whisper, "Who is that gentleman in the mustaches?"

"Oh! don't you know him?" returned Mrs. Rawlings, "the best creature in the world—Captain Scott Dingle. Shall I introduce you?"

"What is he celebrated for?" inquired Sir Peter Jinks.

"Well, I don't think he's celebrated for anything," replied Mrs. Rawlings, laughing, "unless it is his good-nature." Whereupon Sir Peter joined Mrs. Rawlings in a short grim laugh.

"He stood for Yarlton, I believe?"

"Oh! don't you know all about that?" said Mrs. Rawlings; "sit down here beside me, and I'll tell you."

Sir Peter quietly dropped into a chair, and, with his eyes bent upon the ground, listened to the whole history of the election, related with many inaccuracies, and in a humour of good-natured exaggeration that placed poor Dingle's share of the transaction in the most ludicrous light, and by no means contributed to elevate Mr. Rawlings in the estimation of the bank director.

"He is such a good creature, that Dingle," said Mrs. Rawlings; "we've known him, I don't know how many years—long before we ever dreamt of a house in Park-lane. Mr. Rawlings does not forget his old friends, Sir Peter, as you'd say, if you knew all he has done for poor Dingle."

"No doubt, no doubt," returned Sir Peter; "I dare say he has done a great deal for him."

"Everything; put him on the committee of his own line, and gave him I don't know what in shares. It was a lucky day for him, Sir Peter, when Mr. Rawlings took him up."

"Gave him shares?" repeated Sir Peter; "a fortunateman to have such a friend as Mr. Rawlings."

"There," said Mrs. Rawlings, "look how confidential they are together. I declare it's quite pleasant to see that good-natured captain in such spirits. And to think that he set up against my husband—ah! ah!"

Sir Peter raised his head, and saw Mr. Rawlings in close conversation with the captain, who seemed to be listening attentively to him. In a few minutes Mr. Rawlings drew

Dingle away through the crowd, Sir Peter following them with his sinister eyes till they disappeared.

Making their way through detached groups down the stairs, including sundry batches of flirting lovers and heated dancers, who had come out to cool themselves, Mr. Rawlings and the captain passed into a small library on the ground floor. A person buttoned up in a dusty mackintosh, as if he had just come off a journey, rose from a table at their entrance. It was John Peabody, looking very drugged and jaded. The captain shook hands with him good-naturedly, but, perhaps, in rather a florid manner. It was evident that Peabody had all the hard work of the line upon his shoulders, with as strong a natural taste for idleness as the captain himself, while the captain was enjoying the honey. The distance between the committee-man and the secretary was obvious the moment they sat down, although, it is only justice to say, that the captain wore his honours with as much gentlemanly friendliness as was consistent with their relative positions.

"Where is the bank-book?" said Rawlings.

Peabody placed it before him.

"We have a special meeting of the committee to-morrow," said Rawlings, addressing Dingle, "and as it is necessary to have some of our work ready before we meet, I want you to sign these cheques. The signature of two members of the committee and the secretary is all the authority we require. Here they are. It will save you the trouble of attending."

"All right, I suppose?" said Dingle.

"Right?" repeated Rawlings; "Dingle, unfortunately you're not a man of business, or you'd never put so absurd a question. We want the cheques to pay for purchases I have made on account of the company, for which receipts must be laid before the committee in the morning. If we were to wait for committees to do these things, we should never get through our work."

"True enough," returned Dingle; "they do nothing but walk in and walk out again, pocket their guinea, and throw all the labour upon you. Afraid, Rawlings, I must plead guilty myself—but hang me if ever I was cut out for business. I can sign my name, however, thanks to some venerable schoolmaster, whom I can never be sufficiently grateful to, for that's about the extent of my qualifications. *Eccce signum!* we must vote a piece of plate to you by and by for doing our business for us."

"That will do," said Mr. Rawlings, folding up the cheques, and handing them to Peabody; "and now we will release you. I have other business with Peabody."

The captain was rejoiced to be liberated, and sauntered back up the stairs, humming a light air, and pleasantly impressed with the advantages of a position which attached so much importance to his signature. Reflections of a similar nature were, probably, passing at the same moment through the mind of Mr. Rawlings.

Dingle lounged into the ball-room, and, taking up his station in a corner, with his back negligently placed against the wall, began to survey the company through a gold eyeglass, with which he had recently indulged himself, and which hung suspended over his white waistcoat, on a small and almost imperceptible black cord. He scarcely knew half-a-dozen people in the whole of that assembly; but he looked as much at home as if he knew them all. No man was ever more completely in his element.

The music of a waltz was dying out, and the dancers were dropping away to the sides. The universal Clara was surrounded by a group of gentlemen who were trying to get up a promenade against a tide of people, and Margaret retreated into a recess at the end of the room. Her partner, a bashful and awkward young man, stood hovering over her, without uttering a word. The situation was rather embarrassing to the young lady; but she was speedily relieved from it by the re-appearance of Lord Charles Eton, who came up and spoke to her. The awkward young man took the earliest opportunity of vanishing into the crowd. Presently there was a seat vacant near her, and Lord Charles glided into it. The low and quiet tone of his voice, the subjects he talked about, and his unaffected good-breeding, interested her. She felt herself in the presence of a superior mind, and was flattered by the consideration with which he treated her. He seemed to be as familiar with art and literature, as if such topics alone had occupied his studies; and she felt so much pleasure in listening to one who had charmed the senate with his eloquence, that she spoke little herself. The feeling he inspired was that of admiration of his talents. This kind of experience was new to her; it awakened her intellect and absorbed her attention.

She was too much engrossed to notice the movements around her. If she had, she might have seen the baroness

at a little distance observing her attentively, and now and then, through the groups that passed and repassed, she might have caught the anxious eyes of her father. There came a little pause in that agreeable conversation, and looking up, almost unconsciously, she saw, for the first time, a gentleman standing in the shadow of the draperies of the window quite close to her, gazing upon her with a fixed and earnest expression. She quickly withdrew her eyes, she hardly knew why. But curious, nevertheless, to know who it was, she ventured, a few minutes afterwards, to look at him again. Their eyes met, and this time she did not take them away. She thought she remembered the face. There was an alteration, but the well-known features—especially the eyes, which are the last to suffer change—could not be mistaken. She instantly rose from her chair, and put out her hand.

“Henry Winston!” she exclaimed.

Henry Winston it was, with a very serious aspect, and not quite so handsome as when he used to wear his dark hair clustering in rich curls over his neck, but retaining enough of his boyish beauty to testify beyond doubt to his identity.

“Miss Rawlings,” replied Henry, taking the extended hand, “I was afraid you had forgotten me.”

“Miss Rawlings!” echoed Margaret, in a smothered voice; then checking herself, she added, “I did not know you were in town. When did you arrive? and why did you not come to see us?”

“I arrived only yesterday,” returned Henry; “and I came here to-night with Lord Charles. Didn’t he tell you I was here?” directing the question partly to Lord Charles.

“I must plead guilty,” said Lord Charles, “to a very excusable omission. But my friend Winston will forgive me; for he used to talk to me at college so much about you, Miss Rawlings, that he cannot be surprised I should forget him in your society.” This was said with a pleasantry so graceful and good-natured, that Henry Winston, although evidently mortified, accepted the apology with a forced smile.

“Are you come to make any stay in London?” inquired Margaret.

“I hardly know,” replied Henry; “but I am happy to say I have done with college. I don’t happen to be so devoted to learning as my friend Lord Charles.”

“I beg of you not to believe that modest speech, Miss

Rawlings," said Lord Charles; "I assure you he took his degree with infinite credit."

"Have you seen Mamma and Clara?" inquired Margaret.

"Oh! yes, I have had a long gossip with them both."

"And never came to speak to me?"

"You have been so engrossed," returned Henry in an under tone, "that I could not find an opportunity. Great changes have happened since I saw you."

"You do not find us changed to our old friends, I hope?" said Margaret.

"Clara," said Henry, "is just the same as ever—not an atom changed."

"Well, and Margaret? Do you think I am changed?"

Harry Winston looked gravely at her, without answering the question. At this moment there was a general movement towards the door.

"I think," observed Lord Charles, "they are going to supper." As he spoke, he drew close to Margaret.

"Margaret," whispered Henry, hastily, "I have a hundred things to say to you—and you are so surrounded here that I despair of getting a quiet moment. Will you let me take you down to supper?"

Margaret smiled, and with her old frankness placed her hand on his arm. Childhood had come back upon their hearts, and in the midst of that brilliant throng their thoughts were busy with memories of the happy hours they had passed together in the Wren's Nest.

They had forgotten all about Lord Charles, till they saw him afterwards, a long way down the supper-table, taking wine with Mr. Rawlings.

CHAPTER III.

DISCIPLINE AND IMPULSE.

LORD CHARLES ETON was the youngest son of the late Marquis of Westland. He had reason to boast of a line that was at once ancient and respectable; and had the good sense to know that antiquity without respectability is not much to boast of. The Westlands had not the honour of coming in with the Conquest, and were beforehand, by at least a couple of centuries, with the Restoration. They traced their origin neither to Norman adventurers, nor Court beauties, but to a

pure Saxon stock. The first Eton on record was said to have been a member of the Witenagemot; a shadowy conjecture supposed to be duly authenticated by an ambiguous signature to one of the old charters. The tradition had come down in the family, and as there was nobody to call it in question, it passed into an historical fact in the Peerage Books. The patent of nobility was conferred by Edward III. upon Reginald Eton, who held a command under John of Gaunt in the expedition into Gascony, and who married Tacina, daughter of Sir Ralph Gresloyme, and second cousin to the Queen of France. But, as the whole lineage of this noble family may be found at full length in the Extinct Peerage, we may spare ourselves the trouble of embroidering our pages with the numerous intermarriages, heroic actions, and heraldic glories by which the Westlands were honourably distinguished.

We must remark, however, that throughout the early period, the history of the race was a perfect martyrology. The Etons, even to the junior branches, were famous for their gallantry in the field, and their patriotism in the council-chamber. We cannot tell how many of them fell in the ditches of besieged towns, on ramparts and savage plains, abroad and at home; or how many of them were fined, imprisoned, and executed; but it is certain that the heroic spirit of the family might be tracked in blood from generation to generation, and that each new Eton, as he came into life, showed a rampant desire to emulate the deeds of his progenitors.

The obvious influence of an ancient lineage upon the characters of its descendants is one of the advantages of the patrician order. It insures us a race of men whose pride is at stake in the maintenance and transmission of an honourable reputation. Liberty and equality are grand ideas, although how they came to be associated passeth our understanding. For ourselves, we have no ill-will against liberty and equality, and have nothing to say to the philosophers who want them, except that we wish they may get them. But when the philosophers treat the traditions of old houses as so much waste paper, or faded tapestry, we are afraid that in their eagerness to crack the shell, they let the kernel drop out. Armorial bearings, quarterings, and such like pictorial emblems are no doubt as tawdry and despicable in the eyes of philosophy as gilt gingerbread, or the Lord Mayor's coach; but they have their uses nevertheless. The representative of a long line of hereditary honours has to answer to the dead

as well as to the living. He cannot stand with soiled hands in the presence of his "sheeted ancestors." There are fools and profligates in all ranks; but we have this check upon noble fools and profligates, that they occupy the foreground of the stage, and all eyes are upon them. The undeveloped celebrity who, with knitted brows and folded arms, falls into the group behind, has a sullen conviction in his mind that, if real merit had the precedence of accidental fortune, he ought to change places with the fellow who is mouthing it so villanously in front. But if he did, what then? It would only be to substitute a raw recruit for a drilled performer.

Lying in a soft and mellow obscurity amongst the more brilliant incidents of the Eton martyrology was a little love-story which had been the subject of many a ballad in the olden time, and which the family cherished as a scrap of poetry let in upon the gorgeous record. It related to a certain valiant knight, one Marmaduke Eton, who, invulnerable in war, was captured during an interval of peace by the beauty of a peasant girl. The feudal blood of the Etons revolted from such an alliance; but Marmaduke, although threatened with disinheritance, kept his faith with Sybil Hunsdon. His kinsmen turned their backs upon him, and cast him out. But he was prouder of his wife than of his kinsmen, and loved her the more for the sufferings his love of her had drawn upon him. In the course of time it happened, after much sorrow and hardship, that this same Marmaduke, who had borne himself so heroically through adversity, came to be the most prosperous of all the Etons, and the founder of the titles by which they were destined to be distinguished in the Red Book of after ages. The elder branch died out, and Marmaduke recovered his inheritance, which derived additional lustre from the renown he had won in arms. Now Sybil Hunsdon was the mother of that Reginald upon whom Edward III. conferred a patent of nobility; and of the portraits of warriors in chain-mail, and judges in flowery wigs, and ladies in satin and guipure, that graced the great gallery of Hollenden, the family seat in Devonshire, the most prized of all was that of Sybil Hunsdon, the peasant girl. There was another portrait of her in a house belonging to a junior branch of the family in Portman-square, where she appeared to still greater advantage in a russet dress and white coif, seated on a bank, with Marmaduke peeping through a thicket behind, being an ex-

act representation of the first meeting between the rustic beauty and her gallant lover.

The large house in Portman-square, at the time of our narrative, was the residence of Lord William Eton, the brother of the late marquis, and uncle to Lord Charles; an old bachelor, stern, testy, and concentrating in his own person the accumulated pride of the entire roll of the Westland genealogy. Upon Lord William fell all the mantles of all the Etons. As for the marquis, who was only a few years older than Lord Charles, nobody ever thought of looking to him for the maintenance of the family dignity. There was not a drop of the grand old blood in him. He was a production of the present day, a mere modern man of fashion, who rendered himself as conspicuous by his dress as Nature had made him by an unmeaning face and a narrow head, terminating above in a point, like the head of a bird, and below in a lanky imperial. The chivalry of his race was extinct in the marquis; but it survived, in all its strength, freshness and vital energy in Lord William, who, deeply mortified at the luxurious effeminacy of the elder brother, bestowed his heart and his patronage upon the younger.

Lord Charles resided with his uncle in Portman-square; or rather lived there in a suite of rooms which were set apart specially for his use; and as his uncle seldom dined at home, preferring the ease and independence of his club, he may be said to have had the whole of that great house to himself.

On the day after the ball at Park-lane, Henry Winston was to dine *tête-à-tête* with Lord Charles, and to go with him to the Opera in the evening. They had been inseparable at Oxford—intimate, confidential; and in that youthful fervour which leaps over time and space, and sees the ends of things before they have had their beginnings, these two young men swore an eternal friendship. In the short separation that subsequently took place between them, Lord Charles had already established a position as a public man, and Henry Winston had made no advance in life beyond the routine step of matriculation. They met, therefore, under altered circumstances. The alteration was the type of a marked difference in their characters, showing the mental activity and calm perseverance of the one in contrast to the gay heedlessness and undisciplined impulses of the other: cold reason opposed to eager feeling—a strict sense of justice to prodigal generosity—the power of controlling the emotions to incapability of resisting them—

strong will to impetuous passions. Yet this very collision of qualities had hitherto attracted them to each other. But the idle days of college were over. They were now coming out into the world, and had their separate paths and objects to pursue; and the points at which they diverged were now made clear for the first time in a practical light to both. Henry Winston felt all this the moment he entered the drawing-room.

It was a dark, heavy apartment, furnished with great old-fashioned sofas and lumbering chairs, and having upon the whole a solemn and oppressive aspect. There was no light, except such as came fitfully from the fire, which, revealing in snatches the outlines of antique curtains and the formidable frames of the family pictures, brought out its dreariness in full relief. Lord Charles received his visitor rather ceremoniously—perhaps unconsciously from the force of his town habits. Henry Winston looked languid and fatigued; Lord Charles, constitutionally placid and reserved, did not betray a solitary trace of the last night's late hours. After ten minutes of dull commonplaces, they were summoned to dinner.

The impression made upon the guest was much like the shock of a shower-bath, without its invigorating effects. He was chilled by his reception, and by the air of cold grandeur that brooded over the place—it was all so unlike the free and hearty intercourse, and negligent chambers in which their early attachment had grown up. He saw the wide space that lay between them at once, and it sent a bolt of ice to his heart.

The room in which they dined was so large that, lest they should lose each other in its dusky shadows, they were obliged to be boxed in by a couple of stately screens that shut off its distant extremities; and, although a massive chandelier threw a flood of light direct upon the table, Henry Winston could see nothing over the top of the opposite screen but a thick haze, swimming and undulating, and making the scene still more dismal. They were waited upon by a single servant. Henry Winston was so sensitive to every incident of the dinner, that this trivial circumstance, instead of putting him at his ease, increased his acute sense of the change which a brief interval of time had wrought between them. He regarded it as an evidence that Lord Charles did not like to oppress him by any show of attendance, as if he wanted to spare his pride a needless display of the inequality of their fortunes. Henry Winston did an injustice to his host. Lord Charles had

chosen his course in life as a practical politician, and, upon principle, cultivated the utmost simplicity in his *ménage*, as best becoming one who desired to be esteemed as a man of business rather than as a man of rank or fashion. It was an affectation, perhaps; but it was deliberately adopted, and consistently acted upon.

The servant was the impersonation of freezing decorum; a grave, austere man in plain clothes, with a face almost religious in its severity, small glassy eyes, hard features that never relaxed a muscle, and a thick mouth surrounded by a series of creases that seemed to carry the dust of centuries in their depths. He looked as if he had descended from generation to generation with the whole family of the Etons, and had come down express to watch over this particular dinner, like a death's head at an Egyptian feast. Henry Winston having never dined with Lord Charles in town before, and bringing with him sundry pleasant memories of their roystering days at college, had, probably, made up his mind for a gay evening. But all his anticipations were annihilated. The stillness and formality of the entertainment—the intense quietness of Lord Charles—and the glum visage of the attendant, who hovered about his chair like Mephistophiles, filled him with gloom, and he wished himself out of the house twenty times before the cloth was removed.

At last, dinner was over, the grim man in black disappeared behind the screen, and they were left alone. Henry stretched out his legs, and began to breathe more freely.

"You seem tired, Winston," said Lord Charles.

"Dead beat," returned the other; "it was so late when we broke up; I had the lights and the music dancing in my head, and hardly slept a wink all night."

"I think I left you behind me?"

"I stayed to the last. The Rawlings, you know, are very old friends of mine, and it is so long since I have seen them, that I couldn't get away."

"Tell me, Winston, who is Mr. Rawlings? They have a story in the House of Commons that he was originally in some menial capacity, and married his master's widow, and got on in that way. Can it be true?"

"I believe so; but I don't remember anything about it myself. Since I have known them, which is, in fact all my life—they have always been in good circumstances. But latterly he has made an enormous fortune by railroads."

"A shrewd, clear-headed man."

"Very."

"One would hardly expect from so obscure an origin such refinement in the family. I used to think that your descriptions must have been exaggerated; and I confess I went there rather anticipating a disappointment. But I found that you had not estimated them half so highly as they deserve. The younger sister particularly. I wish you would try that claret, Winston. Come, man, open your eyes, and fill your glass. This is not like old times, Harry!"

"No—it is *not* like them. No matter. Go on. What were you saying about my descriptions?"

"That if you had the slightest tinge of poetry in your nature, you would have idealised the portrait of Margaret Rawlings, instead of painting her like a commonplace beauty in a valentine. That girl has a soul, Winston,—an intellect, which, as far as my experience goes, is rather a rarity in the sex at her age."

"Did you never see her before last night?"

"Never."

"Well, I have known her all my life—we were children together; and, although I am not a poet like you, and have not the slightest ambition to be one, I have read the character of Margaret Rawlings more truly. Intellect! That's what you are always running upon. I have never thought of it, for her intellect is the least of her merits. If you had seen her, as I have done, away from all this excitement, you would have discovered that she has a heart, which, in my opinion, is the one charm that makes a woman divine. She is the most unselfish being in the whole world."

"Of course she has a heart—and, I strongly suspect, whatever discoveries you imagine you have made, she hasn't found it out herself yet. But I won't allow you to put on any romance before me. Of all the men I ever knew, you are the least romantic. The very effort at a sentiment makes you look perfectly lugubrious."

"Let us talk of something else, Eton. This gloomy old house of yours has put me into the blue devils. What are you doing? When are we to look for you in the Cabinet? Happy fellow, you are, to have the world before you like a football—rank, wealth, honours! What chance has a poor devil like me in the race of life against such odds?"

"The chance that every man has who sits down earnestly

to his work. And, as we have touched that subject, let me ask you what are your views? It is time you should begin to think of some definite course."

"Views? I have none. The future is a dead blank before me; and, I don't know how it is, I can't make up my mind to anything."

"That won't do, Winston. The next few years will decide, for good or evil, the current of your life. I thought you had resolved upon the army, and I looked to see you gazetted by this time for active service."

"Pshaw! it was only a boyish fancy. I have given it up. No, I see things now in a different light. It would never do to be knocked about the world, without a hope to cling to, or a scrap of earth that one could call one's own."

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"Nothing. Dream and be quiet—get old all at once, and die like a respectable gentleman; or, in a fit of desperation, do something to astonish you—I don't know what."

"Yet you talk of giving up your boyish fancies. Why, you talk more like a boy than ever. You used to have a resolute spirit—what is become of it?"

"I tell you what it is, Eton," said Henry Winston, filling up his glass to the brim, and drinking it off, "it is very easy for you to preach a homily to me. When a man is secure in his own position, he can advise like an oracle. Look at the difference in our situations. At Oxford, we were rowing in the same boat, and neither you nor I troubled our heads about what was to happen one week after another. But now we are out on the great highway, the case is altered. I see the alteration clearly. I feel it acutely. You are safe; you may do what you like, make fame at your leisure, or leave it to others: you can live without it. What is there for me? To select a profession, for which I have no inclination or capacity: work hard against the grain of my feelings—grind my heart to powder—and, perhaps, get nothing by it in the end—neither fame nor profit."

"You do yourself an injustice, Winston, in comparing our situations. We have not created them ourselves, and finding ourselves in them, we are bound to make the most of them. This much, at least, is certain, that anything is better than idleness."

"I like it," returned Winston, carelessly; "it suits my humour. I can't settle myself to work as you can—so, I

suppose, I must float down the stream, and take my chance."

"And what will be the consequence? Occupation must be found of some kind. No man can go on wasting himself upon the air for ever; and Henry Winston will be sure to hit upon something to do—fall in love, perhaps, marry, and sink into obscurity under a load of anxieties."

"Then, in your wisdom, one of the penalties of such a position as mine is, that a man ought not to marry?"

"I have strong opinions upon that subject, Winston," replied Lord Charles, gravely.

"So have I," returned Winston.

"No man is justified in incurring the responsibility of marriage, who is not in a position to maintain it. That is an obligation we all owe to society."

"I owe no such obligation. Why should a man sacrifice his happiness to society? What has society done for him, or is ever likely to do for him, that he should immolate himself in its service? A comfortable doctrine for men like you,—but if you would change places for five minutes with me, you would renounce it for ever."

"You are mistaken. I should act strictly in conformity with my convictions."

"I believe it," said Henry Winston, looking rather savagely at Lord Charles; "I believe it. That is exactly what I should expect you to do. You are a man of the world; and you are building up your place in it even now, icing yourself for the frozen height you are to occupy by-and-by, when I shall be drifting about at the mercy of the winds. Your health, Eton!" he continued, wildly, filling up his glass again; "and may I live to see you Prime Minister of England! If I saw you raised to the summit of your ambition to-morrow, I should pity rather than envy a man who held such a creed." Henry Winston was in a humour to quarrel with anybody, or fight with his own shadow. Lord Charles saw that some secret irritation was preying on his mind, and preserved his composure with well-bred self-control.

"Thank you, Winston," he replied, "for your good wishes. But as I don't think it very likely I shall ever be Prime Minister, the probability is that I shall not tax either your pity or your envy. Creed, my dear fellow! A man in public life embraces a set of opinions, and all I meant was that in

urging them upon others I should feel bound to act on them myself."

"Then why not adopt reasonable opinions? Why take up a set of opinions that operate as a penalty on one class to the exemption of another? Why shouldn't every man have an equal right to consult his own happiness? You don't know what it is to love, and you don't deserve that any woman should ever love you. You smile at that—but I am serious. I never was more serious in my life; and if ever you marry, I shall look upon your wife as a victim, brought up, garlanded, to the altar. You will marry a fortune, Eton, not a woman. That's the end and aim of your career."

Henry Winston had drunk more than usual; it was evident in his flushed cheek and excited manner; and Lord Charles, perfectly cool and collected, heard him to the end very good-naturedly, and then quietly remarked, "It will be time enough when such an event happens, Harry, for us to compare notes on that subject. I don't think either of us have much thought of marrying at present; at least, I never understood that you had."

"If I had, Eton, there was a time when you should have been the first man to whom I would have confided it. I don't say so now."

"And why not now? I don't ask your confidence, Winston; but I will not surrender my right to it. We have never kept any secrets from each other—and you wrong my friendship if you withhold from me any private feeling in which my advice or assistance would be of the slightest service to you."

"Answer me one question," said Winston; "have you no secret which you have withheld from me?"

Lord Charles looked at him first very gravely—then a smile broke over his face—and he answered—"None—not one."

"I am satisfied," returned Winston.

The grim man now glided in from behind the screen.

"Well, Fletcher?" inquired Lord Charles.

"The carriage, my lord," said Fletcher, and glided out again.

"Come, Winston, you are full of fancies. Let us see if we can't get rid of them at the Opera. The carriage is at the door."

In a few minutes the two young men—the one self-possessed and unruffled, the other in a shockingly sullen humour—were on their way to the Haymarket. The house was crowded; and as they passed into the stalls, Lord Charles

recognised a number of acquaintances. Henry Winston did not see a human being he knew. He felt more and more isolated, and cut off from the circle of which his friend was so distinguished and popular a member; and the reflections which ensued upon this feeling were not very happily calculated to put him into better temper.

Between the acts, they strolled into the pit. Lord Charles seemed to be intimate with everybody; and the easy way in which he chatted with different parties in the pit tier of boxes, awakened in his wayward companion a bitter sense of the solitude of the great world to a man in his position. He was utterly alone in the crowd. Sickened with the glare, and depressed by a morbid comparison between his own lot and the brilliant life of Lord Charles, he determined to make his escape at the first opportunity. By some accident, he suddenly lost sight of Lord Charles, who, an instant before, had been standing close to him. He looked round the pit and into the stalls, but Lord Charles was nowhere to be seen. This was a relief to him. He might now go away without any discourtesy to his friend. And, being at liberty to go, he did what most people, who don't precisely know their own minds, do on such occasions—he lingered a little longer.

It was his first visit to the most magnificent theatre in the world, and the incubus which had hitherto weighed upon him being removed, he indulged his eyes with a general survey of the house. As he glanced from box to box, he caught a glimpse of a face he thought he knew. His heart beat tumultuously. Even at that distance, he felt that he could not be mistaken in the features of Margaret Rawlings. But he was not quite assured, and was afraid to be confident of it, till he saw the radiant head of Clara thrown forward, and gazing down into the pit. He was sure they must have seen him. At all events, the temptation was not to be resisted, and, scrambling his way into the passage, he flew up the stairs till he gained the lobby of the first circle. He had great difficulty in finding out the box, and had to traverse the round two or three times, and make another ascent before he reached it. Just as he entered the box, the curtain had fallen on the last act of the opera, and the ladies were rising to go away. The first person he saw was Lord Charles Eton, gently dropping a shawl over the shoulders of Margaret Rawlings.

The mystery of his lordship's sudden disappearance was

now explained. Henry Winston felt his blood leaping and burning through every vein in his body, and even the pleasure which Margaret exhibited at seeing him could hardly assuage the impetuous passion that raged in him at that moment. A conviction that Lord Charles had treated him with perfidy seized upon him, and turned his feelings into bitterness and hatred. A very jealous temperament was that of Henry Winston—a mad heart that loved and hated to extremity, too apt to trust and distrust, touched to the core by trifles, and as easily won by kindness as it was stung by neglect or duplicity.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure," said Margaret; "but why did you postpone your visit till we are just going away?"

There was no time for a reply, although Henry Winston had a sarcasm on his lips ready to launch against Lord Charles. Mr. Rawlings hurried them out, and seemed displeased at the interruption; and when Mr. Rawlings was displeased, there was no misunderstanding the expression of his face. Mrs. Rawlings was not of the party, and Henry Winston was resolved to have his revenge by escorting Margaret to her carriage, and consigning Clara to his lordship. But, quick as he was in his tactics, he was foiled. Just as he was about to offer his arm to Margaret, Mr. Rawlings interposed.

"My lord," said Mr. Rawlings, "will you give your arm to my daughter?"

Henry drew back, and had the satisfaction of seeing Lord Charles conduct Margaret down the stairs. Clara was leaning on Mr. Rawlings. He was again alone.

The incident was a trifling one; but trifles of this kind are sometimes of grave import in their influence on the lives of the wisest men. Henry lingered behind. He saw them go down the stairs. Margaret once looked back, but he turned his head away, as if she, too, had conspired against him. The crowd increased in that narrow space; but he still kept them in sight, undetermined what he should do. He felt that he was not in a mood to trust himself again that night in the presence of Lord Charles, whose coolness and propriety always gave him the advantage in moments of heat and irritation; and so, at last, he wilfully lost them in the multitude that came pressing out through the doors. He was thankful for that. It gave him an additional grievance to brood upon; and he went home to his lodgings in so fierce a state of mind that it was a lucky thing he didn't happen to meet Lord Charles on his way.

CHAPTER IV

FULL OF MISCELLANEOUS BUSINESS.

It must not be supposed that because Mr. Rawlings accompanied his daughters occasionally to the Opera, and other fashionable convocations, he was giving way to the temptations of high life, and neglecting the primary concern of money-making. On the contrary, it helped him to make more money than ever. The scheme of a great career in London includes a vast deal of hard work in the way of publicity. Mr. Rawlings was alive to that important necessity. His private opinion of Italian music, and the poetry of motion, would not have justified the expenditure of much time or money upon either; but the outlay was amply remunerative as a puff collusive. To be seen in all places where people of wealth and consideration showed themselves, and to have his name, like his railways, quoted in the newspapers, was a part of the machinery with which he worked.

Mr. Rawlings had an object in view beyond that of enhancing his position as the lion of the Sharemarket. He aimed also at getting the lion's share for his daughters in a market of another kind. His ambition soared above his prosperity—as it is in the nature of ambition to do. He had risen with his opportunities, and was equal to them. He saw coronets, and stars, and badges glittering round him, and eagerly wooing his favour. He saw that money-power is greater than titular-power, and can move at its will the wires of the conventional pageant. And the more familiar he became with the patrician world, which at a distance looks so grand and authoritative, the more he felt how weak and foolish it grows when it comes crawling round the feet of Moloch. And Richard Rawlings resolved to turn this folly and weakness to the profit side of his ledger, under the head of high alliances for his daughters.

As yet he took little thought of Clara's settlement. She was making conquests by the score, and was untouched by any of them; and the safer course was to leave her for a time to herself. The case was different with Margaret, whose sensibility and plastic nature exposed her to a hundred dangers from which Clara was exempt. It was not enough merely to protect Margaret against the hazard of choosing for herself, but to give her the advantages of his own experience by choosing for her. He accordingly noted all her actions with the

keenest scrutiny, and soon discovered that there was an old childish regard existing between her and Henry Winston, which, under favourable circumstances, might ripen into an attachment—a consummation at which his prudence took serious alarm. While he determined, therefore, that she should not be thrown in the way of a young man who was cast on the world without a profession, and who had no better prospect than the limited competence of an obscure private gentleman, he omitted no convenient occasion of asking Lord Charles Eton to his house. Love, however, is never at a loss for opportunities. Rose Winston had just been invited to spend a few weeks in Park-lane; so that, in spite of all paternal safeguards and precautions, Henry was in the house almost every day, although seldom at the hours when Mr. Rawlings was at home.

The numerous occupations of the member for Yarlton left him little leisure for the details of the domestic plans he had laid down. But he confided in the weight of his authority, and in the marked encouragement he gave to Lord Charles, who frequently dined with him, and was rarely at such times interfered with by the presence of Henry Winston. How that little comedy went forward in the drawing-room during the mornings while Mr. Rawlings was engaged with railway boards and committees of the House of Commons, and in the evenings when his lordship's attentions to Margaret became conspicuous to the whole family, may be better understood than described. At present our business is with Mr. Rawlings, who is seated in his small library, busily engrossed over a heap of letters.

Dismissing them one after another with rapidity, he comes to one which must contain something pleasant, for he reads it with a smile, and sets it apart from the rest, It runs as follows:

“Yarlton, 16th Sept.

“MY DEAR SIR,—I have a little favour to ask of you, which I hope you will excuse in an humble and admiring constituent, and old acquaintance, notwithstanding the discrepancy in our situations in life. In fact, I have often thought of writing to you, but, knowing that you have the affairs of the nation on your shoulders, I waited for a suitable opportunity. But you know, my dear sir, that at my age a man can't wait for the grass to grow, and business is not so favourable to me as it used to be, there are so many new lights and pretenders setting up in my line. The railroads have produced a complete

metamorphosis in the vital statistics of this country, and if they have done good in some respects, they have done unaccountable mischief in others, and brought such shoals of competitors into Yarlton that the old inhabitants are entirely swamped. In my profession there are no less than three strange doctors, and four general practitioners, all within eight months; so that you may judge what physic is come to in Yarlton. I have made a calculation of the contingencies arising out of this deplorable state of things, and find, upon a close estimate, that if all the inhabitants that are able to pay, were to fall sick for three months out of the twelve, and if every married woman under five-and-forty (for I don't much count on them after that) were to give a pledge of affection to her husband once a year, the net proceeds wouldn't average 150*l.* per annum, all round, to the medical men of the town. You may rely upon the accuracy of my figures, and you have my authority to make the appalling statement to the House of Commons. If I might take such a liberty with you, I would say that our legislators are sadly in want of such facts as these.

"Now, without some particular mark of distinction, a man in my walk (although 'Established thirty-five years' is staring them in the face over the door) has no chance against such odds, and it occurred to me that you could do me a great service very easily with your overwhelming interest. It is a delicate thing to write to you about, considering how deeply you are concerned in the railroads, but there are calamities, my dear sir, which no human power can avert; and certainly nobody could have foreseen that the railroads would have been attended with such loss of life, such frightful carnage, I may say, as we read of every day in the newspapers. This, of course, can't be obviated, I suppose; but I think it would give some confidence to the public if each line were placed under the care of a well-known medical practitioner, and it is to seek such an appointment that I have made this intrusion on your valuable time. It would set me at once above the heads of all these interlopers if I could put up over my window, 'Surgeon to the Great London and Yarlton Railway;' and I have a strong expectation that it would induce numbers to travel on the line that are at present deterred from doing so.

"Will you, my dear sir, turn this in your mind. I am sure the public would be for ever your debtor, not to speak of the obligation to me. I know it would be an arduous post at my time of life, but I do not shrink from my duty; and I

should never have the happiness of attending on the mangled limbs of any of the unfortunate passengers without a feeling of satisfaction that would bring its own reward.

"May I venture to ask after Mrs. Rawlings and the young ladies? I hope they are in the enjoyment of good health—man's greatest blessing here below. That's my maxim with all my patients—it has been my loadstar through life. Honesty, my dear sir, I always say is the best policy; and, although the times are as bad as they can be, my constant study is to keep my friends out of the doctor's hands. Hoping for an early response, I remain, &c., L. POGEY.

"Richard Rawlings, Esq."

Poor Poge was evidently going down in the world as fast as Mr. Rawlings was rising in it; and his Utopian ideas about railroad conservation were not likely to break his fall. What could Mr. Rawlings do with this once round and merry philosopher, who had unfortunately survived the age of medical credulity, and been flung at last upon the hard times of iron facts and scientific progress? Poge had made a grand sweep of popularity in the golden era which preceded the fatal Apothecaries' Act; but since that time a new generation had sprung up, the Yarlton population, even to the believers in cauls and tar-water, had become more enlightened; younger men had pushed him from his stool, and the Widow Waters, and other gossips, who had acted as a faithful chorus to his uncertificated genius, were gathered to their grandmothers in the churchyard. To lift Poge up again to his former professional altitude, would have been as impossible as for Poge to re-animate the victims of the railroad. But Mr. Rawlings did all he could, which was to write a brief letter of regret to Poge, informing him that there was no such appointment at his disposal, and that if he could suggest any other that might be available, influence should be used to procure it.

And this letter went down to Yarlton, and being written off-hand by a man in the full tide of prosperity to one at the last ebb of fortune, seemed very dreary and heartless to its recipient, and set him thinking gloomily enough about the strange reverses and odd ups and downs of the world. The little parlour at the back of the dispensary looked dimmer and more desolate than ever that night; and its solitary tenant sat over that letter in a mood of dismal cogitation, reading it again and again, and trying to extract from the

turn of its scanty words, and even from the hasty curves of the handwriting, some gleams of lurking kindness. Pogeey was constitutionally an optimist; but he had been latterly hoping so hard against hope that his vivacity in that way was nearly extinguished, and it was a long time before he was able to see how he could make use of Mr. Rawlings. How he did make use of him will appear by-and-by. In the meanwhile we must return to the library in Park-lane.

On the day in question there was to be a general meeting of the shareholders of the London and Yarlton Railway, on which occasion a turbulent discussion was expected touching the financial management. It had been remarked that every line with which Mr. Rawlings connected himself was up at a great premium; and as this uniform success invariably ensued upon his measures, it was naturally regarded as a test of the soundness of his judgment. Certainly such wonderful results could have been accomplished only by a singularly sagacious policy, or by some necromancy in the art of drawing up balance-sheets. Now, as the bulk of the public did not believe in magic, they referred these results to the ability of Mr. Rawlings; but a captious minority, who had no faith even in the gains they pocketed, pretended to think that there must be a mystery somewhere, although they could not find it out.

At the head of this minority was Sir Peter Jinks, the bank director. Sir Peter was a man of considerable wealth, amassed as a merchant in the city of London. He belonged to that section of the mercantile community which stands as proudly and ostentatiously on the integrity and respectability of its transactions, as the aristocrat upon his quarterings. His position was in the fullest sense legitimate. No man could pick out a stain in his life. Sir Peter represented one of the great commercial cities in Parliament, and was a leading man in the House on all questions of trade and political economy. He set his face at the beginning against the railway mania, and predicted that it would end in a convulsion. By nature a hard, just man, the habits of a counting-house, where business was conducted on the strictest principles, had rendered him distrustful of all speculations and speculators. From the outset of Richard Rawlings' parliamentary career, as a railway magnate, he had vigilantly observed his proceedings, taking upon himself, as a public duty, the task of tracing the rise, progress, and end of what he regarded as a national delusion. In order that he might be the better enabled to

pursue his investigations, he purchased shares in the Yarlton line and its dependencies, and narrowly scrutinized the manner in which the committee discharged their functions. It was clear to him that they were mere puppets in the hands of the chairman; but so consummate was the skill with which the affairs of the company were carried on, that, although he suspected the honesty of every item in the accounts, with all his experience and acuteness he could not detect a single flaw. His doubts, however, were not to be satisfied by a dexterous exhibition of figures, and he continued to hang on the track of Richard Rawlings like a bloodhound.

The eyes of this mercantile lynx had gleamed sometimes so piercingly upon Rawlings as to awaken him to the necessity of caution. That sagacious observer was always on his guard against men who, like himself, never take their spring till they are sure of their object.

A few more letters were opened and despatched, when Crikey Snaggs came into the library, and announced Mr. Michael Costigan.

Before Mr. Michael Costigan makes his appearance, we must say two or three words about him.

You had only to look at him, or hear him speak, to be assured that Ireland had the honour of giving him birth. He had the mellifluous brogue which is native to the neighbourhood of Limerick, a place where his ancestors flourished in stone castles long before the flood. The Costigans, descended from a line of kings, were rich in royal blood, but unfortunately in nothing else; and the present representative of that regal race was reduced to the necessity of living upon his wits. The railway mania brought up to the surface many gentlemen whose talents must otherwise have been buried in obscurity; and amongst them Mr. Michael, or as he was jocularly called, Mr. Mick Costigan, shone out conspicuously. He belonged to no profession whatever. He scorned professions. He existed entirely under "skyey influences," which spurned routine employment or business drudgery. But put him to any meteoric achievement, lying out of the ordinary system, and he carried everything before him. Being wholly irresponsible to himself, or to anybody else, he was the best man in the world for all kinds of eccentric negotiations and social forlorn hopes.

It would be difficult to convey to the uninitiated the exact nature of his connexion with the great railway movement; but as the railways entered largely into the history of the

time, and Mr. Costigan represented a new class of industry which they called into existence, we must endeavour to describe his multifarious occupations.

Mr. Costigan had a large parliamentary acquaintance, selected chiefly out of that loose squadron of Irish members that used to skirmish so briskly on the outskirts of party questions. The grand thing in concocting the prospectus of a new railway was to get up a committee of apparent responsibility; and as the "promoters" were mostly scampish attorneys, who had no connexions amongst reputable people, the services of Mr. Costigan, who always walked about with a list in his pocket of intimate friends, having what he called "handles" to their names, were inestimable. He could make out a committee in a twinkling; such a committee, too, of M.P.'s, baronets, and honourables as came upon the innocent public like a blast of trumpets. To be sure it was only a nominal committee, after all, the few names that had any substance attached to them being used without authority, and the rest being little more than the labels of wasted patrimonies, fit only to make tails for kites. But like a gaudy sign over an ill-furnished hostelry, it answered the temporary purpose of attracting flocks of customers. For the services thus rendered, Mr. Costigan was generally placed on the committee himself, with a batch of shares at his disposal, the payment for which was slurred over by a little private management. Sometimes when a bill was in progress he acted as a sort of flying parliamentary agent, an anomalous employment which we should despair of rendering intelligible by the most minute account of the sundry and complex intrigues it involved. At other times he was engaged in "rigging" the market. This ingenious process consisted in putting out upon the Stock Exchange a quantity of shares in an incipient line, and buying them up himself at a large premium, so as to secure a dazzling quotation in the next day's papers, a bait which the *gobemouches* were sure to swallow. Then he was of great value in the committees, for, although he never troubled his head about practical details, and knew nothing of local statistics or any of the other problems of geography and finance comprehended in a railway scheme, he had a gift of speech that bore down all opposition. Whenever a stormy meeting of shareholders was anticipated, Mr. Costigan was the whipper-in, with a leash of followers at his back and a bundle of proxies under his arm, prepared to beat down the

clamour with a terrorizing majority. Such were the agencies by which the railway bubble was blown till it burst. The greatest statesmen have made use of worse instruments on weightier occasions, and Mr. Rawlings did not hesitate to avail himself of the many-sided dexterity of Mr. Michael Costigan.

When the door of the library opened, the visitor came in with a great noise and bustle. That was his way; and his large and ungainly figure gave additional impetus to his vigorous bearing. He had a wild shock head, with hair scattered and starting out at cross angles, bushy whiskers, and a broad face gleaming with an expression of headlong bacchanalian gaiety. His dress was so loose, that it was a wonder how he kept it together upon him. Everything he wore seemed detached, and ready to fly off:—his cravat streamed over his shoulders in a tie that looked as if it were dropping out; his coat was thrown open, and stood away from his body; his waistcoat wandered over his chest, restrained from total separation by only a single button; and his great trousers were crumpled all round his legs, with the flaps of the pockets hanging down at the sides. The daring negligence of his dress was the type of his character.

"It's done!" he said, as he roared into the room; "you may snap your fingers at them—done as clean as a whistle."

"Sit down, Mr. Costigan," replied Rawlings; "and tell me quietly what you have done?"

"Done?" responded Mr. Costigan; "got a hundred and fifty proxies complete in my hat—*verbum sap*. You don't understand Latin? No matter. We'll dispense with the Latin, and stick to the aboriginal vernacular. Jinks is a cantankerous ould reptile, and a mighty unpleasant object to look at."

"Is he coming to the meeting?"

"Of course he is—but I've made a hole in his pipes that'll spoil his music. The minute he pops up his wizened abortion of a dirty baked face, I've my body-guard ready to give him a shillaloo. We won't let him speak a word—that's the short cut to get rid of him."

"No, no, we mustn't do that. We must hear him, and answer him. Are we sure of a majority?"

"Are you sure it's pelting rain? Majority! Only order out your coach, and let us be off."

"What's the time?"

"I can't exactly answer for the punctuality of my kettle—somehow or other it's always out of order; but I've a sort of superstitious suspicion that we're late."

"Now understand, Mr. Costigan—the business of the meeting is simply to carry the resolutions of the committee. The less discussion the better; and no uproar or hostility against Sir Peter."

"Not the least taste in life. Let him fire away and more power to him."

The meeting was to be held in the great room of the Freemasons' Tavern, and thither Mr. Rawlings, accompanied by his robustious ally, hastened at a spanking pace. In the little ante-chamber where the committee assembled for preliminary arrangements, the murmur of the crowd could be distinctly heard, and surging above the general buzz might be detected the ominous coughs and haws! of Mr. Costigan's adherents, who were evidently preparing their lungs for the approaching conflict. At length the committee made their appearance, and Mr. Rawlings, in dumb show, was voted into the chair. You could see at once, from the aspect of the meeting, that there was angry work before them.

The business was opened in a few curt words, by which the shareholders were informed that the meeting was convened to receive the report, and re-elect the committee. The report was then read in due form, and when it was put to the vote, Sir Peter rose, and began with "Before the report is put to the vote, I beg—" he had scarcely delivered himself of half the sentence when an indescribable clamour broke out at the lower end of the room. Mr. Rawlings immediately interposed, and requested a hearing for Sir Peter; but he succeeded only in obtaining a hearing for himself, the row increasing when Sir Peter rose for the second time.

Mr. Costigan's body-guard were clearly over-doing their instructions, and the moment was come for that gentleman to bring his influence into play. Starting up, and running his hands through his hair, as if it were not horrent enough already, he addressed them with a stentorian humour that elicited rounds of laughter. "Readin' and writin'," he said, "was a wonderful invention, but spakin' had the whip-hand o' them. Now we've had the readin' and writin', let us have a little spakin' Let the gentleman spake—maybe he has a trifle of a report of his own—he's a bank director, and you know there are quare reports sometimes from the Bank," finishing with a

rolling wink of his eye, which drew down fresh demonstrations of applause from his adherents. It may be remarked, *en passant*, of Mr. Costigan, that like most of his countrymen, when he became animated and oratorical, he gave full vent to his rich brogue, which, in ordinary conversation, he kept somewhat under control.

Sir Peter, having obtained a brief silence, proceeded to state his objections to the report. He said that he acted entirely on public grounds—that he did not impugn the integrity or capacity of the committee, or of his honourable friend, the chairman; but that he wished for some information concerning certain items in the balance-sheet. There was a large reserve of shares unaccounted for. What did the committee do with them? He saw names on the committee of gentlemen who were never heard of in the mercantile world before—he wouldn't specify—but he would ask were they all properly qualified? [At this question, Dingle twisted his bamboo between his legs.] How was the dividend created? Where did it come from? It was impossible to get at it by any ordinary process. Was it a fact or a fiction? Did it come from profits, or was it only taken out of one pocket and put into another? Then there were negotiations of enormous magnitude with other lines. Who authorised them? Who conducted them? Had any member or members of the committee a personal interest in these transactions? These observations and interrogatories were delivered amidst many interruptions; but when Sir Peter touched upon the personal interest of the committee, it was no longer possible to restrain the zeal of Mr. Costigan's body-guard, who saluted Sir Peter with such a storm of hisses, as compelled him to sit down. Several members of the committee rose at once, but Mr. Costigan was again on his legs, and was heard above them all.

"What's the question?" demanded Mr. Costigan. "I told you you'd have a quare report from the Bank, and now you've had it can you make head or tail of it? I tell you what it is, if you were as strong as Samson, and as ould as Methuselah, and had as many curls in your wig as there are waves in the say, I defy you to unravel what the gentleman means. The Irish is a beautiful language, gentlemen, a powerful, prismatic language, and as full of words as an egg is of meat; but you have one word in your language that beats all the other words hollow, and that word is—*rigmarole*. Now, gentlemen, *rigmarole* may do very well in the Bank parlour—but this isn't

the Bank parlour ; this is an open meeting of free-born Saxons who are not to be mystified by that kind of jargon. What was it all about ? He'd be a clever fellow that'd tell you that. All I could make out was, that the hon. gentleman wants to know where the dividend comes from. Where does he think it comes from ? Of course, I suppose he thinks it comes from the sky. Well, I've no objection to that. It's a celestial shower entirely, and it has my good wishes that it may continue to rain upon us till there isn't a drop left. If the gentleman's afraid of the wet, let him put up his umbrella, or get out o' the way. Question, Mr. Chairman ! What's the question ?"

This oration utterly overwhelmed the Bank director. The small party that supported him cried out in vain for a hearing ; Mr. Costigan had effectually put an end to the possibility of any further speech-making on that side. Mr. Rawlings, chagrined at the ludicrous turn given to the debate, and anxious to sustain the formality of the proceedings, begged to say a few words ; he was ready to give any explanations required—the accounts were printed, and in the hands of the shareholders—the committee had arduous and difficult duties to discharge—but it was impracticable on such occasions to go into every insignificant item of expenditure—some confidence must be reposed in the discretion of the committee, or no man would undertake such onerous labours—for his part, he had worked day and night, and all the recompence he asked was the continuance of their confidence—was it not enough that their affairs were prosperous ?—a large dividend was the best test of ability and prudence in the management—he gave his honourable friend full credit for the excellence of his intentions, and he wished they had the advantages of his experience and high character in the committee ; but he felt at the same time that it would be a flagrant injustice to the gentlemen who had served them with such zeal, not to re-elect them—he was aware of only two questions before the meeting—the adoption of the report, and the re-election of the committee, and, without trespassing further on their patience, he would at once put them to the vote.

This clear and satisfactory statement was received with loud acclamations ; whereupon Sir Peter Jinks' minority made another effort to protest against the proceedings ; and intermittent exclamations of " Subterfuge ! " „ Packed meeting ! " and other charges of unfairness assailed the ears of

the committee. The confusion became general—everybody was standing up and shouting—the body of the room presented a scene of indescribable uproar, in the midst of which a brief pantomime was enacted on the platform, the purport of which was revealed only to the newspaper reporters, who informed the public the next morning that the resolutions were carried by acclamation, and that the unanimous thanks of the meeting were voted to Richard Rawlings, Esq., M.P., for his able conduct in the chair, and for the valuable services he had rendered to the company in the management of their affairs.

CHAPTER V

TOUCHING A CHORD THAT ALL MEN HAVE PLAYED UPON IN THEIR TIME.

THERE was nothing in the meeting of shareholders, boisterous as it was, to disturb the placidity of Mr. Rawlings. He was accustomed to such scenes, and went through them without turning a hair. Having effectually carried his object, he could afford to regard with indifference the opposition of Sir Peter Jinks. Nor did it appear to make any difference between that honourable gentleman and himself; for the moment after the meeting broke up, happening to jostle together in the room, they shook hands in the most friendly manner, and made mutual protestations of the great personal esteem in which they held each other, a sentiment in no way compromised by the criminatory position the shareholder had taken up towards the chairman.

It happened to be Wednesday, and as there was no House sitting, Mr. Rawlings drove home, bringing back Mr. Michael Costigan in his carriage. Mr. Costigan was not on intimate terms with the family, but, being useful to Mr. Rawlings, he had sometimes been asked to stay for dinner, when they happened not to have any company they were particular about. On this occasion the young ladies were driving out with the Baroness de Poudre-bleu, and Mrs. Rawlings expected them back at seven. They had gone to some French milliner's, to whom the Baroness had recommended them, and it was probable, Mrs. Rawlings thought, the baroness might remain, and dine with them. But there was nobody else expected, and Mr. Rawlings, not holding the presence of the Poudre-

bleu in much awe or reverence, kept Mr. Costigan to dinner, just as he was, in his flying coat and dishevelled cravat.

Presently the carriage drove up to the door, and Mr. Rawlings and his railway familiar, who were closeted in the library at the end of the hall, could hear ringing voices, and pattering feet up the stone staircase to the drawing-room. Soon afterwards came a loud knocking and fresh arrivals; and in a few minutes a servant announced dinner.

Upon entering the drawing-room, Mr. Rawlings was surprised to find the party augmented by three persons in addition to the baroness, who, having made up her mind to dine, had contrived to telegraph her intention through the medium of a note in pencil to her son, directing him to come for her just before seven o'clock, so that Mrs. Rawlings could not help asking him to stay; and as he brought his friend Mr. Trainer with him, there was no alternative but to invite him too. The third person was Henry Winston, who happened to meet the ladies by the most extraordinary accident in the world at the door of the French milliner's, and of course accompanied them back. Good-natured Mrs. Rawlings could not avoid asking them all, with a thousand apologies for a family dinner, which was turned into a pleasant compliment by the baroness, who declared that an impromptu dinner was the most delightful of all things. For her part, there was no house she was so happy in, if they would only let her take them just as they were, without any ceremony. And so to dinner they adjourned, as unceremoniously as she could desire, Mr. Rawlings taking charge of the baroness, and Henry Winston securing the hand of Margaret, while Mr. Costigan gave his arm to Mrs. Rawlings, leaving Clara and Rose to Mr. Trainer and Mr. Bulkeley Smirke.

They were all very lively during dinner, which was to be mainly ascribed to the vagrant humours of Mr. Michael Costigan, and the grim witticisms of Mr. Trainer. We should observe of Mr. Trainer that he was a cadaverous-looking man, with a perpetual gloom on his face, which gave a peculiar effect to the funny things he said. He never moved a muscle while other people were breaking their sides; and having a literary reputation which loomed upon the world from a heap of anonymous labours, the particulars of which were known only to his confidential friends, everybody felt it necessary to laugh at his jokes, under an impression that there must be something in them.

There was much merriment about a new novel, which Mr. Trainer slyly turned into ridicule by absurd panegyrics. This brought the baroness's book upon the *tapis*, Mr. Trainer contriving, as he generally did, some excuse for alluding to it.

"Ah! that poor book of mine!" exclaimed the baroness; "I often wonder I had the courage to publish it. Wherever I go, I hear of nothing else. One would suppose an author was an hippogriff, or some such monster, one is so stared at and plagued."

"That depends, ma'am," observed Mr. Costigan. "A friend of mine wrote a book that nobody ever heard of; and the poor devil is consequently obliged to blow his own trumpet; and, upon my honour and word, it's mighty hard work for a gentleman to be always advertising his genius in company."

"But it saves him advertisements in the newspapers," said Mr. Trainer; "cheap fame."

"Dog cheap," returned Mr. Costigan; "will your ladyship confer your lustre on me, by taking a glass of champagne with me?"

The baroness had the sweetest smile in nature, and never smiled so sweetly as when she wished to appear gracious to people of inferior breeding. Now Mr. Costigan, wild as he was in appearance, was not quite a new specimen of humanity to the baroness. She had met many Costigans abroad, floating about the German baths; and having had occasion to put their peculiar qualities to the test, she was by no means indisposed to treat this particular Costigan with civility—especially as he was a friend of Mr. Rawlings. Accordingly, she took champagne with him, throwing such an expression of mischievous tenderness into her eyes, as to quicken Mr. Costigan's susceptible pulses in an alarming degree. From that moment his glee mantled up wonderfully; and he drank wine, in turn, with everybody at the table.

"The worst of it is," observed the baroness, "that one never gets a sincere opinion. People always think it necessary to praise one's writings. I should like, just for the novelty of the thing, to hear a little objection from somebody that has really read the work."

"What's the name of the book?" whispered Mr. Costigan to Mrs. Rawlings.

"Well, I forget; something about the Revolution."

"That's enough," returned Costigan. "Objection, your

ladyship!" he continued, aloud, addressing the baroness; "it's easy for you to say objection. I ought to know something about revolutions, for I am a sort of a revolution myself; and I'm curious to know what anybody has to say against your ladyship's unanswerable treatise on the subject. Let them say it—I'm ready to answer them."

"Ah! Mr. Costigan," replied the baroness, with another bewildering smile, "you gentlemen are always so flattering! What I want is to hear the opinion of some of the ladies. Women, you know, write to the hearts of women; as to the men, I don't believe they have such things."

This delicate innuendo drove Mr. Costigan to take refuge in a decanter of sherry, from which he poured out a glass, which he mentally telegraphed to her "ladyship."

"Who has read it?" inquired Mr. Trainer.

"I have," cried Rose Winston.

"Now, then," said Mr. Trainer, "for an honest opinion."

Rose blushed all over, and wanted to escape; but she was stormed by a general demand for her criticism; and she went on.

"Well, the book is very clever, of course. I know nothing about that. But shall I tell you exactly what I think?"

"Of all things," replied the baroness.

"Don't spare it," cried Mr. Trainer; "authors, like kings, seldom hear the truth from their friends."

"Then, first of all," observed Rose, clearing her merry voice, "my opinion is, that I wish the baroness had not made Agatha marry that horrid count."

"Not marry the Count?" observed Costigan, "then I'd like to know who you would have her marry?"

"Her own true lover, François, to be sure," was the reply.

"That's natural enough in a young lady," observed Costigan; "but as a political critic, I must say that it was more consistent with a revolution that she should marry the count. It was a deep touch, that!"

"And to leave her lover because he was poor, for one she didn't care about, merely because he had a fine title?" replied Rose, bridling up indignantly.

Harry Winston had listened to this latter part of the conversation rather uneasily. He was sitting next to Margaret; and when Rose spoke of leaving the poor lover for a man with a fine title, he inadvertently looked at Margaret—these young people are always so ready to turn everything to their own account! Their eyes met, and were full of a piteous

intelligence, which did not stand in need of words to make it perfectly clear.

"But the sequel," cried Costigan; "doesn't that settle the business to your satisfaction?"

"I think it makes it worse," answered Rose; "the count commits suicide, which, I am sure, nobody was sorry for, and Agatha goes into a convent."

"And where would you have her go?" demanded Costigan, coming to the charge again.

"I would not have her go anywhere," said Rose; "but the moment the count was dead, I would have made her marry poor François."

This courageous criticism met the entire approval of all the young people present; and Mr. Costigan's protest on the ground of political expediency was outvoted by a handsome majority. Even the baroness admitted that, so far as sentiment was concerned, Rose was right; and Mr. Trainer thought it was the highest compliment to the book that Miss Winston should feel as much interest in the characters as if they were all real; adding that, in his opinion, it was the most profound novel of the day—an opinion in which Mr. Costigan loudly concurred.

Soon afterwards the ladies rose to retire. The movement was marked by some little silent diplomacy. Henry Winston contrived to squeeze Margaret's hand as she fidgeted out of her chair, continuing, with his head apparently turned in another direction, to follow her with his eyes till she was out of sight. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was not unobservant of these proceedings; and, being in a very sullen humour, pretended a perfect indifference to the ladies—dusting his waistcoat with his napkin as they passed, and with the other hand twirling his miniature mustache. Mr. Costigan, upon the first intimation of the break-up, had rushed to the door; and there he stood, making magnificent genuflections, topping the climax of his aboriginal gallantry, when the baroness came sweeping by, with an air of sweetness, that made him throw his coat nearly off his shoulders, as he returned, full of triumph, to the table.

"Come, boys," cried Mr. Costigan, already betraying the excitement of the wine he had taken during dinner, "fill your glasses for a toast. May I give a toast, my noble hero?"

"Anything you please, Mr. Costigan," replied Richard Rawlings.

"No skylights or heeltaps," exclaimed Costigan, standing

up with oratorical pomp, and looking round to see that every glass was full; "Sir,—there are moments when the human heart is agitated by emotions—don't laugh, young man, you'll know better when you grow older. We've enjoyed, sir, at your hospitable board this day an intellectual feast of the highest order. But I ask you all confidently, what would that intellectual treat have been without the presence of lovely woman? Is there a heart amongst you that doesn't respond to my appeal? Sir, the extent of our obligations to that sex is unknown. From the cradle to the grave—I speak advisedly—woman is with us everywhere. We are born of woman, and when we die don't we go back to sleep in the arms of our Mother Earth? Everything that's beautiful and grand and glorious is of the female gender. Isn't Liberty a woman? Isn't Britannia a woman? And what do you say to the Muses and the Graces? The only bull in the fine ancient ould heathen mythology was making Love a little boy. It's easy to see that the gods and goddesses were not made in Ireland, or we'd have done justice to the sex by giving them their due in the matter of love. A bumper, boys, for woman, upstanding, and three times three, and all the honours! Immaculate, immutable woman! Take the fire from me! The ladies, sir, that have left us, and may they never leave us again, and my blessing be on them wherever they go. One—two—three—hurrah! bathershin!—one—two—three, &c., &c., &c.

To give greater energy and effect to his motions as fogleman to the "fire," Mr. Costigan leaped upon his chair, and, planting one foot upon the table, brandished his glass violently in the air. Mr. Rawlings had some difficulty in subduing his enthusiasm, and prevailing upon him to resume his seat. The fact was, he had indulged too freely, and having got it into his head that he had made a splendid impression on the baroness, his hilarious nature was thrown into a condition of ungovernable excitement.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, whose face looked like a piece of white satin, happened to be seated exactly opposite to him; and he sipped his wine with so sickly a hesitation, and betrayed so visible a horror of Mr. Costigan, that the riotous Milesian fell foul of him all at once, with that rich dare-devil banter which has so much whimsicality and sunshine in it that its victim doesn't exactly know whether he ought to be vexed or pleased—to laugh at his tormentor or knock him

down. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke took it all as a very grave offence, and made two or three attempts to say something stringent and dignified, which only laid him the more bare to the unmerciful raillery of the brawny humorist. Henry Winston took advantage of a roaring broadside from Mr. Costigan, to make his escape to the drawing-room, whither we will follow him.

The ladies were scattered about; the baroness on an ottoman with Clara—Mrs. Rawlings indulging her ruminations in an easy chair, comparing, probably, the points of difference between Park-lane and the old inn in Gracechurch-street—and Rose Winston and Margaret (they had always been confidential) in deep discourse in a corner. Henry was not two minutes in the room when he was at their side. And now for the secrets.

Rose was going to be married! Going is a long word in such matters, when the momentous action itself is as yet dependent on circumstances; but young hearts are apt to make it very short. She was engaged to a clergyman in the country, just ordained, and only waiting for a curacy to enable him to make himself the happiest man in the universe. There was little fortune at either side, except a trifling annuity, which the good old Mr. Winston was willing to allow them to eke out their income; but there was a great deal of love, and that was all the riches they cared for. True to its core was the heart of Rose Winston, who already longed for her month in town to be out, that she might return again to the tranquil country; and what with fervent talk about the hedge-rows, and the fields, and green solitary places, and peeps into her daily love-letters, she and Margaret never felt themselves so happy as when they got away from the crowd, and gave free vent to their feelings. Margaret had her secret, too, and Rose quickly detected it. In such intimacies it is impossible to hide the first troubles of the heart, and trouble was already casting its shadows over the heart of Margaret. Rose was her *confidante*, and, although her own brother was the person most deeply interested, Rose up to this moment had never betrayed her trust even to him. The heroism of a purely-minded girl is proof against the world.

There was no alternative but to confess to Rose what her penetration, rendered keen by sympathy, had already discovered. And Margaret did confess unreservedly. Strong antagonisms, and the pressure of circumstances, had brought

her love to flower so rapidly that she trembled to acknowledge even to herself how suddenly the feeling had become developed, and how completely it had taken possession of her. Had things gone on in the ordinary way, it might have lingered long before it came to maturity, as fruits ripen slowly and seasonably in the sun that are quickened out of season in the hot-house. And so it was with Margaret Rawlings.

In the last month or two the visits of Lord Charles Eton had become more and more frequent; and his object was now too obvious to be mistaken. At first, Margaret did not see this—it made no impression on her. She liked Lord Charles, and received his attentions simply because they pleased her while she was yet free to be pleased. She was the last to see what others saw plainly. The first thing that awakened her suspicion was the marked coolness that had grown up between Henry and Lord Charles. She attributed it in the beginning to waywardness and caprice, or hardly thought of seeking a cause for it, till it showed itself in so many unmistakeable shapes as to force upon her the full conviction of the truth. Having once taken alarm, the most insignificant trifles became intelligible, and threw a flood of light upon her position. And now she discovered what she had hardly observed before—the fretted spirit and haggard looks of Henry Winston, the canker that was feeding on his life, the unsettled mind, the alternate fits of morbid despondency and reckless indifference to the future. And now, too, she discovered the feeling of which she had hitherto been unconscious, and which had laid its tender roots in her heart long ago in her happy childhood.

From that moment a restraint was over all her actions. The assiduities of Lord Charles became irksome and painful; but she was afraid to betray her dread of them, under the growing conviction that they were encouraged by her father. The fear of bringing matters to issue made her equally reserved and timid in her conduct to Henry Winston. And thus she was obliged to endure, without seeming to observe it, the daily sight of his silent agonies, to see his life wasting away under her eyes, without daring to stretch forth her hand to save him.

We are afraid that Rose Winston, who was so profoundly happy herself, and who was so anxious to put an end to Margaret's misery, had a wicked design in her head when she spoke out so boldly at dinner. Her courageous vindication of the rights of true love, through a story so strangely applicable to

the situation of her friend, looked very like a stratagem to take Henry and Margaret by surprise. She had her own notions on the subject, highly coloured, of course, by her own position, and she thought it was the height of folly and cruelty in this pair of suffering lovers to hide their feelings from each other any longer. It was on this very point she was talking to Margaret when Henry joined them.

"What, Harry!" she cried; "pray, sir, who sent for you? I hope you don't imagine we couldn't amuse ourselves without you?"

This savage little speech was spoken with a playful significance, which Henry, who, with the pressure of Margaret's hand tingling at the tips of his fingers, was in the right mood to interpret exactly as it was meant. So, drawing a chair close to them, he asked them what mischief they were plotting.

"Suppose you try and guess," said Rose.

"Well," he replied, "perhaps you were discussing that difficult question you started at dinner upon the baroness's book. Very difficult, and yet, to me, very easy."

"Not so bad a guess," said Rose, slyly pressing Margaret's arm; "is it, Margaret?"

"I should like to hear Margaret's opinion upon it," said Henry.

"So should I," observed Rose.

"But I can't give an opinion," said Margaret, "for I have only just begun the book. You must wait till I have read it."

"That's only an excuse," said Rose; "now, Harry, state the case, and make her pronounce judgment."

"The case," said Henry, "is simple. I will put it in a few words. There is a lady who has a devoted lover—one who has known her long, from their youth upwards; he has neither rank nor riches to offer her—nothing but his love. Changes take place in their lives—new scenes, new temptations, and the poor lover is doomed to find a rival in the person of a man of title, whose wealth and station overshadow him. What should the lady do?" Henry faltered a little.

"How can I answer such a question?" said Margaret. "So much depends on circumstances."

"No, Margaret," cried Henry, eagerly; "nothing on circumstances—all upon the heart alone. If she loved him as he believed she did—happier for him he were dead, if it were otherwise!—should she not risk all, forsake all, to reward his devotion? How would *you* act in such a case?"

"I? I can't tell—I can't imagine myself in such a position."

"Think, Margaret—if the life of one who loved you were in your hands, how would you decide?"

"While you are thinking, Meg," cried Rose, breaking away from them, "I have something to say to Clara—I shall come back in a minute."

In vain Margaret looked beseechingly at Rose to stay where she was. The lovers were alone.

"Every moment is precious, Margaret. It is *my* doom you must pronounce—we have each of us long foreseen this moment, and now it is come,—do not turn from me. I cannot live another day through the tortures I am suffering. One word will console and strengthen me. Speak it, and save me!"

"Henry—not now. Spare me for the present—give me a little time."

"You know not the misery to which your reserve condemns me. Have pity upon me; utter the one word 'hope,' and I will be patient. From the days of our childhood, you have been the idol of my heart. Even at college I could think of nothing else, and he who has thrust himself between us knows it—he knows it, and, with his superiority of birth and influence, he would mercilessly betray and destroy his friend. But he shall answer for it."

"No, no, Henry, for my sake—promise me that you will not commit any rash act."

"I will promise you anything—God knows, I love you too well, too deeply, to alarm you by a threat—I did not mean that—but the struggle is fearful—it is killing me. I could bear it all, and worse a thousand times over, if I were sure—yet why should I doubt? There is no truth in the world, if your eyes have not confessed a feeling which I only ask you to put into words to make me happy. Why do you listen to me if you do not love me? Speak, Margaret—in mercy to me—speak one word."

"Be satisfied, Henry; you have nothing to fear from Lord Charles Eton."

"Then why is he here so constantly? I may be secure as yet; but who can answer for the future, if opportunity be given to him to persevere?"

"I can. Will you rely upon my word? Promise me to take no notice of his visits, and I will be frank with you."

"I swear it solemnly."

"He is a friend of my father's. It is my father's pleasure that he should come here. I cannot help it, but I will not disguise from you that his visits have made me unhappy since I have seen what you have suffered. I have tried to save you all the pain I could. But what can I do? You do not suffer alone."

"Thank you, from my soul, Margaret, for that sweet word. Go on,—let me hear your voice again,—it falls like music on my heart,—why, what a fool I am! Speak again,—I am in heaven!"

"Be patient, dear Henry. There—there."

"I will trust all to you, Margaret. You are wiser and calmer than I am. Only give me a pledge that you will be mine, for I know they will try to separate us. What can I rely upon, poor, without a profession, against a man who has your father on his side, and rank and power?"

"Your best reliance is on the truth of her you love. Do you believe that all these years, through which we have grown up together, have left no sacred memories in my heart? Do you suspect that I am dazzled by this hollow life? If you do, you wrong me. What pledge more do you require? You must not give way to fancies,—we are both placed in a difficult position,—let us trust to time. Can I say more? Should I say so much if I were not interested in your happiness—if—if my own did not depend on it? See—they are coming. Patience—patience, dear Henry."

At that moment the drawing-room door opened, and the first person that made his appearance was Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, looking slightly flushed, followed by Mr. Rawlings and the rest of the gentlemen. Henry had just time to snatch up Margaret's hand, and impress a burning kiss upon it, in a flutter of agitation, which could hardly have escaped notice, had it not been that all eyes were attracted by the noisy entry of Mr. Michael Costigan. The jovial Milesian, labouring under the double inspiration of wine and beauty, had no sooner found his way into the room, than with a rather zigzag and tempestuous movement, he made his way direct to the table where the baroness was seated.

"I have the honour to announce to your ladyship," he began, "that during your absence, ma'am, we drank the 'Ladies,' with all the honours of war. The ladies, and no surrender. 'First flower of the earth and first gem of the sea!'

We embraced the whole sex in one comprehensive sentiment."

"Will you take coffee, Mr. Costigan?" said Mr. Rawlings, trying to get him away from the table.

"No, sir! Coffee? It would be a gross insult to your claret. I have a veneration for your claret. I hold the name of Sneyd in reverence, and if you insist upon my finishing the night with you, it isn't with coffee you'll put me off."

Wheeling round again to the table, and nearly upsetting a salver which a servant behind him was handing round, he discovered that the baroness had left her seat, and retreated to another part of the room.

"The bird's flown! I hope we haven't frightened the ladies. It's a curious fact in my career that the ladies have always been remarkably partial to me, and if I am called upon to explain the reason of it, I should say it's because I'm remarkably partial to the ladies myself. What are we going to do? Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you, my gay young sprisan?" he cried, catching Mr. Bulkeley Smirke by both shoulders, and sinking together with him into a chair.

There was a slight stir of alarm at the other end of the room, and Mr. Rawlings, apprehensive that this rough play might end in a quarrel, came to the assistance of Mr. Smirke, who was endeavouring to extricate himself violently from the powerful grasp of the Irishman; but there was no great need of his interposition. Mr. Costigan was only in a mood of rampant fun, very perilous, to be sure, when practised upon people who were not disposed to put up with it, but harmless enough if it were allowed to have its own way. The danger consisted in crossing Mr. Costigan's humour, and Mr. Rawlings was sufficiently aware of the peculiarities of his friend, to know how to deal with him at such moments. Getting rid of Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, who was not sorry to make his escape, he drew Mr. Costigan into a corner, and then gradually succeeded in coaxing him out of the room.

The party soon afterwards began to disperse. Henry was the first to go. His heart was brimful, and his last look into the eyes of Margaret sent him off with a delicious sensation that totally revolutionised his whole being. The gloom of months had cleared off and vanished. His pulse beat wildly, and he took the stairs at a bound, longing to be alone, that he might indulge his imagination in a reverie over his new-

born happiness. The first object that presented itself when he got into the street was Mr. Michael Costigan, leaning in a posture of profound cogitation against the rails. Henry did not perceive him till he knocked up against him.

"Mr. Costigan!" he exclaimed.

Spinning round with an indescribable leer on his mouth, and twining one hand into Henry's arm, while he held the rails with the other, Mr. Costigan replied—"Hush!—that ould Rawlings is a humbug, to turn people out at this hour of the night upon a cup of dirty coffee!—coffee!—he asked me to take coffee!—very well. Remember that—coffee! Will you stick to me now! What countryman are you? Divil a matter. Will you stick to me?"

"Certainly. Which way are you going?"

"Going? Going back again, as a matter of course. Justice for Ireland, and confusion to coffee. Coffee! think of that! Mick Costigan drinking coffee at this hour of the night! Stick to me now, and we'll knock up ould Rawlings for a glass of punch."

Mr. Costigan, suiting the action to the word, proceeded to carry his proposal into effect, by making a desperate lurch at the handle of the bell. Henry Winston caught his arm, and succeeded, with difficulty, in drawing him away from the door.

"Not for the world. My dear sir, it would be no use. If you want punch, we can easily get it as we go along. Come."

Costigan yielded to his remonstrances reluctantly, and continued muttering "Coffee!" all the way down Park-lane into Piccadilly. He evidently regarded the coffee as a sort of personal insult.

As they walked towards the Haymarket, he made many dead stops, diversified occasionally by asking the passers-by if they'd like a little coffee. Then he wandered into a rambling dissertation on the character of Mr. Rawlings, during which the name of Lord Charles Eton struck upon the ear of his companion.

"Lord Charles Eton!" exclaimed Henry Winston, "what of him?"

"Why, he's one of them, that's all."

"I don't understand you. What do you mean?"

"Where's the place we're to get the punch?"

"Oh! we're just coming to it. What do you mean by saying that Lord Charles Eton is one of them?"

"What are you bothering me about? Isn't he going to be married to one of the daughters?"

"How do you know this?"

"How do I know it? The devil a step farther I'll travel with you till I get the punch."

"Well, then, here—this place will do—in—in!"

They had arrived at the door of a tavern in the Haymarket, and Henry hurried the thirsty Milesian through the passage into the public room. The glare of numerous gas-burners suspended from the walls and the ceiling smote his eyes fiercely as he entered; but Mr. Costigan strode into the white light with the unblinking gaze of an eagle, and standing in the middle of the room, with his coat streaming off his shoulders, his handkerchief hanging loose, and his arms akimbo, called out, "Waiter!" with a power of lungs that made sundry people who were scattered about at the tables start in their seats, and turn round to look at him. Henry was unaccustomed to these scenes, and feeling considerably abashed, and not a little ashamed of being seen in such company, took refuge in an obscure corner, and beckoned Costigan to follow him.

"Materials!" cried out Costigan to the waiter, as a slim young man danced up to the table, and began to brush it with the tip of his napkin. "Don't mind the table, but bring up materials for two."

"Sir!" said the waiter, opening his eyes very wide.

"It's a remarkable fact that you don't understand your own language. Whisky, sugar, and hot water. Do you understand that? And mind that it's hot—screeching hot, or I'll make a public example of you, you thief!"

Henry Winston was all eagerness to learn what Costigan had to communicate about Lord Charles, but it was idle to renew the conversation till the "materials" were served. The few minutes that intervened before the waiter returned seemed a century. Now then! thought Henry.

"You couldn't oblige us with a cup of coffee, could you?" inquired Costigan.

"Certainly, sir. Coffee for two?"

"Make yourself scarce, you villain!" cried Costigan, whose joke, although it was now apparent to the waiter, sent that respectable young man away looking very oddly out of his literal faculties at the strange humorist.

The topic was at length brought round again.

"Well," said Costigan, "my authority for it is ould Rawlings himself; he didn't swear me to secrecy, and if you want my private opinion on the matter, I think he's taking his dealing trick out of his lordship."

"Mr. Rawlings himself! For heaven's sake, what did he say to you?"

In answer to this question, Mr. Costigan entered into an elaborate account of some conversations Mr. Rawlings had had with him on the subject, but it was so embroidered with whimsical parentheses and metaphorical figures, that Henry Winston was considerably perplexed to pick out the substance of it, which amounted to this: that Mr. Rawlings had set him to find out what were Lord Charles's expectations; that, although Lord Charles had not formally proposed for Margaret, Mr. Rawlings was in daily expectation of a proposal, and had made up his mind to accept him; that he had not communicated his intention to his daughter, and did not mean to speak to her about it till the whole affair was settled.

This intelligence produced a terrible effect upon Henry Winston. The vision of happiness he had been going home so exultingly to contemplate was dispersed, and heavy clouds had set in in its place. His agitation did not escape the scrutiny of Mr. Costigan, who at all times had a ready sympathy for the distresses of lovers, but chiefly in his cups.

"Now, make me your friend," said Costigan, "and I'll stand to you like a man. I see it all. You love the young creature yourself. Now just answer me one question. Does she return your passion?"

Henry was humiliated at that moment by a consciousness of shame and debasement that a feeling so sacred, which he had hitherto concealed in the recesses of his heart, should become a topic of conversation in such a place and with such a man. He shrank from it, as from the touch of contagion. But Costigan, spotted all over as he was with the leprosy of drink, had, nevertheless, a lurking refinement in his nature upon this one solitary subject of love, and seemed to understand at once the scruples of his young companion.

"This is not the place or the time to talk about it," said Costigan, in a half-whisper; "keep up your heart, and we'll speak about it again. But, mind what I tell you, don't betray yourself to ould Rawlings. He's a bitter flint. Money's the god of his idolatry, and he'd sacrifice his daughter's affections every day in the week and twice of a Sunday to gratify his

ambition. My darlin' boy, depend upon Mick Costigan. There's few men of my day has seen more duels and abductions, and if I don't put you in the way to circumvent the paternal despotism, it's mighty odd, that's all! Waiter, have you any more whisky in the house? because, if you have, there's a couple of gentlemen here would be after troubling you for ditto repeated."

"The bar's closed, sir," said the waiter.

"Then open it again," returned Costigan.

"Impossible, sir; my mistress has taken the key up to bed."

"Does she go to bed with the key? 'closely locked in beauty's arms!' Well, you needn't disturb your mistress, but if you'd just waken the key, I dare say it'd come down and do us a friendly turn."

"Can't be done, sir. The bar is closed, sir."

"To the devil with the bar!" roared Costigan, leaping up out of his seat, and advancing upon the waiter in full sail, with pennants flying, and his face flushed to the roots of his hair. The few persons who yet remained in the tavern got up out of their seats, anticipating a row, and the waiter fled to the end of the room. Costigan opened upon the company with a brilliant appeal to the liberty of the subject, against the insolence of publicans who were licensed only for the public accommodation. Henry was in no disposition to embark in the controversy, and, glad of an excuse to make his escape, quietly stole after the waiter, paid the bill, and passed out into the street.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH THE PLAINTIFF IN THIS SUIT ENTERS A DECLARATION.

As wretches in a storm nestle together for warmth and shelter, so lovers cling closer to each other in difficulties. The discovery of Mr. Rawlings' design extracted from Margaret and Henry the most intense declarations of mutual devotion. A cruel father may tear true hearts asunder; but, as we very often see upon the stage, they will take the earliest opportunity of rushing into an embrace. And thus Henry and Margaret may be said to have stood, metaphorically, entwined in each other's arms, awaiting the impending descent of parental despotism. What could they do? They had not a single adviser

in the world except Rose, and she was so frightened and bewildered as to be incapable of counselling them. Henry thought of asking the advice of Mr. Costigan; but a vivid recollection of the *tableau* in which he left that gentleman figuring in the tavern, restrained him. Margaret had a notion of consulting her mother; but, upon a little reflection, she was afraid that her mother's interference might do more harm than good. It may appear strange that she did not confide her situation to Clara. This is one of the mysteries of affection which will be perfectly intelligible to all sisters who love each other as these two did. There was nothing on earth she would have concealed from Clara. But there was peril in this business, and she resolved not to implicate her darling in it. She knew Clara's generous nature, and dreaded the consequences of involving her in an act of disobedience to her father. She therefore resolved, in the unselfishness of her love, to bear her sorrow alone, trusting from day to day that some lucky accident might deliver her from it.

In the mean while Lord Charles Eton was calmly maturing his purpose. He liked Margaret for her own sake; but he was a prudent man, and looked also to her fortune. There was little enthusiasm in his character, and that little had been shaped and controlled to practical uses by a strict course of discipline. As a statesman, he had the impassive temperament of William Pitt, to whom the world never gave credit for any capacity of love or tenderness. But it could hardly be predicated of Lord Charles Eton that, like William Pitt, he should ever be caught, in an unguarded moment of passionate gallantry, drinking out of a lady's shoe. Lord Charles was always in his part, as the actors say.

Ambition was the mistress to whom he really paid his addresses, and he selected Margaret to be the priestess at the shrine. A younger son, he was stinted in fortune. He had expectations from his uncle; but they were only expectations, and wealth was indispensable to the career that lay before him. He was not in a position to marry for love; and love was not exactly the position for which he was disposed to marry. He was like hundreds and tens of hundreds of men, who assure you they could never bring themselves to marry *for* money, but who, nevertheless, can never prevail upon themselves to marry *without* it; excellent men, who neither create happiness for their wives, nor heap misery upon them, but plunge them into a cold solution of domestic respectability, in which both are neutra-

lised. How many ladies are there who live in this tranquil way, apparently possessing everything to make life very comfortable and agreeable, and looking quite placid on the surface, while their hearts are perishing!

It was within a few weeks of the close of the session. Members were already making their preparations for the Christmas festivities; and several invitations, which he had not made up his mind to answer, lay upon Lord Charles Eton's table. He paced his library with the aspect of a man who was revolving a grave subject in his thoughts; and, after many pauses, he flung himself into his chair. There was still some hesitation. He was traversing all the points of the question before he committed himself to paper. Then came the decision, slowly but distinctly, resolving itself into a short note, deliberately written and pondered over for a few moments before it was sealed. When it was finished, he rose and rang the bell. Fletcher glided into the room.

"Take this note," said Lord Charles, "to Mr. Rawlings. You need not wait for an answer. Is my uncle at home?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Where is he?"

"In the drawing-room, my lord."

"That will do. Go immediately with the note."

Fletcher glided out.

A few more strides up and down the room showed that there yet remained a source of uneasiness behind. The moment was now come upon the issue of which he had staked his future course. He proceeded to the drawing-room, and was just in time to intercept his uncle, who was going down to his club.

"My dear uncle," said Lord Charles, "will you give me ten minutes before you go out?"

Lord William could perceive that there was something more than usual in his nephew's manner, and—little dreaming of the nature of the communication—he laid down his hat, and, taking a chair opposite to him, said, "Well, Charles, I am at your service: what is it?"

"In the first place," said Lord Charles, "I wish to say that I am bound to your lordship by so many obligations, independently of my respect for your judgment, that I could not think of taking any great step in life without first consulting you."

"Precisely what I should have expected. Your brother is

a frivolous, empty jackdaw—a fool, sir, who has no more notion of what is due to his position as the representative of one of the most ancient houses in the kingdom, than if he were the son of a dancing-master. I look to you to sustain our name. You have begun well—persevere, and the highest distinctions are within your grasp.”

“The course upon which I have embarked is arduous and difficult,” observed Lord Charles.

“No doubt of it; but the greater the difficulty, the greater the glory.”

“A public man, uncle, has many difficulties to contend against besides those of party warfare. I feel this strongly, and it has latterly given me much serious consideration.”

“I don’t clearly see the drift of the observation.”

“I will explain myself. No man can aspire to a high position in England, without the command of adequate resources. It is the vice of our system. The power of our aristocracy does not reside simply in a tradition—it is preserved and fortified by wealth.”

“M——m—ha! Go on!”

“The great leaders of our political parties have not acquired this ascendancy by talent alone. They are backed by the means of collecting their forces round them, and of impressing themselves upon their age by a constant appeal to its material sympathies. The man who distinguishes himself in public life, and who is doomed to an obscure struggle in private, is always a mark for distrust and sarcasm. Not alone is his actual influence doubtful and contracted, but the purity of his motives is suspected. If he is on the popular side, he is a disappointed man; if he is with the government, he is looking for a place. Personal independence alone secures the public man against imputations, and enables him to achieve great objects.”

“Well—and you have been applying this remarkable discovery to your own case.”

“Exactly. My fortune is so disproportionate to the views which, under your sanction, I have ventured to entertain, that I assure you I am much disheartened at the contemplation of my prospects. As it is, I should absolutely despair, if it were not for the advantages I derive from your liberality.”

“It occurs to me, Charles, that you have stumbled upon a palpable absurdity. What has a man who is working in the public service to do with an extravagant establishment?

Besides, that is a thing neither you nor I can afford. Now, I am willing to help you to the utmost; my own personal expenses are nothing; and as far as my fortune goes it is pretty well expended upon this house and Datchley, both of which are always at your service. But if you mean that you expect me to make a settlement upon you, I frankly tell you I will do nothing of the kind. While I live, I will preserve in my own hands the power of keeping the old family pictures in their frames, at all events."

"My dear uncle, you entirely mistake me. I never thought of such a thing. I have already pressed too heavily upon you; and my desire was to consult you on a step which might enable me rather to relieve you of the pressure than increase it."

"And that step is——"

"Marriage."

Lord William looked at him hesitatingly for a few minutes, and then went on—"Marriage! that is a step, indeed, Charles. Well, sir."

"I thought it more prudent not to trouble you on the subject until I had weighed it maturely in my own mind; and I hope you will have no reason to think I have decided rashly."

"I hope not. You say you have decided."

"Well—I mean——"

"Let me understand clearly what it is you mean. If you have decided, why do you trouble me on the subject?"

"No—that is—I have not committed myself—but I confess my reason and my inclination are made up, and it was upon that I wished to have the benefit of your lordship's advice."

"H—m! and if my advice shouldn't happen to jump with your reason and inclination, I suppose you are prepared to throw it overboard?"

"You are too generous to make conditions with me beforehand."

"Why, it seems it is you who make conditions. But we are wasting time. Pray proceed."

"I am well aware of your strong opinions on the subject of family alliances; yet there are considerations which may sometimes be permitted to overrule our scruples on the score of birth."

"I know of none, sir. I read of such things in trashy

novels, but I never knew them hold good in real life. I see plainly what's coming. You have fallen in love, and disgraced your family."

"You wrong me much—disgrace there can be none. Be patient, and hear me."

Lord William had leaped out of his seat, and was walking up and down the room, pushing the chairs out of his way, in a state of high excitement.

"Patient! I *am* patient. Go on!"

"The lady in whom I am anxious to interest your lordship is accomplished and beautiful, and would dignify any station to which she might be called."

"Of course! She's a paragon,—spare your raptures and come to the point."

"Circumstanced as I am, I candidly acknowledge that I should have felt it my duty to struggle against the feeling she has inspired, were it not that—that—the union is highly desirable on prudential grounds."

"Perhaps you will be good enough to descend to particulars."

"Then, in plain words, uncle, the lady has a large fortune."

"A fortune. Who is she?"

"The youngest daughter of Mr. Rawlings, the member for Yarlton."

"The railway man? And you come to me to ask my advice. I'll give it you in one word——"

"Pause, my dear uncle, before you pronounce your verdict. Consider my situation. Mr. Rawlings has the command of enormous wealth; he is one of the richest commoners in England. I admit at once that his origin is obscure, but I never heard a breath against his reputation; he is shrewd, clever, and practical. I have met people of the highest rank at his house. Reflect upon these circumstances, and do not decide hastily upon a measure involving my future happiness and success in public life."

"Have you done? Now listen to me. I have heard *you* patiently. The daughter of this railway jobber has a large fortune. Well? Granted. There are fifty as good baking at this moment in the smoke of Manchester or Liverpool, who would average you a hundred thousand pounds, and would walk barefoot up to London for the chance of becoming Lady Charles Eton. Do you hold your station so cheap as to sell yourself in such a market as that? Are there no women in the aristocracy whose alliance would bring you wealth and in-

fluence, that you must fling yourself away upon a—it chokes me to think of it. I tell you at once, that such a degradation would put an end to our intercourse for ever!”

“No—no—my dear uncle——”

“Don’t call me your dear uncle. I have been your best friend—made you what you are—and this is the return I receive. My house is open to you—I was fool enough to make you my heir. I calculated proudly upon seeing the honour of our ancient house transmitted with credit to posterity through you. Dear uncle! I am no longer your uncle. What! marry the daughter of a railway gambler, picked up, probably, in the train, proposed for in a refreshment room, and the banns published at all the stations for the glorification of the chairman and directors. I shouldn’t be half so outraged if you married a common girl out of the Opera.”

“You must allow me to say that this is prejudice. See Mr. Rawlings, and judge for yourself.”

“See him? Look here, sir,” cried Lord William, seizing Lord Charles by the arm, and taking him round the room; “these are the portraits of some of the ancestors of our family. There is not a stain upon their lives. That is Reginald, who served before Rouen, and, covered with honourable wounds, was knighted on the field. That is my namesake, Sir William Eton, who held a garrison against the Parliament till they were reduced to live upon their horses, and then cut his way through the besiegers. This is the portrait of a Chancellor, who refused to sanction a tyrannical decree of the king’s, and expiated his patriotism on the scaffold. You have heard their histories over and over again. You are familiar with their glories—and now, sir, will you dare to stand in the midst of these worthies of your house, and disgrace the proud name you inherit by a disreputable marriage?”

“I will do nothing, my lord,” replied Lord Charles, “that I should not be justified in doing by the examples before me. I look round as proudly as your lordship on this gallery of worthies, and I see amongst them one who is distinguished above the rest as the founder of our house. In this picture—which I know you treasure more than all the generals and judges in the family—we have a representation of the first interview between Marmaduke Eton and Grace Hunsdon.”

“M—m! There were no railways in those days!”

“I have heard you tell that story, uncle, a hundred times—I have seen your eyes glisten, and grow moist—you cannot

deny it!—at the relation of that pastoral episode in the history of the Eton peerage.”

“Charles, that was five hundred years ago. The world has undergone some revolutions since that time.”

“I have heard you say that Marmaduke was the greatest hero of them all, because he had the courage to lift a peasant girl he loved to his own rank, and to endure poverty and scorn and hardship for her sake——”

“Pish! What has this to do with it?”

“And I have heard you a hundred times declare that you were prouder of the poor peasant girl than of all the marchionesses, and countesses, and maids of honour, with whom the members of our family have intermarried from that day to the present.”

“Well—I admit it.”

“Uncle, if you honour Marmaduke for marrying the woman he loved, upon what principle of justice can you condemn me for imitating so illustrious a precedent?”

“Love? You didn’t say anything about love before!”

“You didn’t allow me time. But it is so, uncle. I love Margaret Rawlings.”

“Bah! The story of Grace Hunsdon is a legend of the old times. She was lovely, innocent—just as you see her there in that picture—they wrote ballads on her beauty—Marmaduke’s devotion to her was a touch of knightly romance that I honour him for—he married her for love—love, sir; she was a peasant, and hadn’t a farthing in the world. It was pure love.”

“But, surely, the accident of having a fortune——”

“Throws suspicion upon it. People will say you married her for her money.”

“They will do me an injustice.”

“I wish she was a beggar, I should like it better.”

“I wish you knew her, and you would like her for her own sake. To be sure we are not in an age of romance, uncle; but the human heart is just as susceptible in the nineteenth century as it was in the fourteenth. Why shouldn’t Margaret Rawlings shed as sweet a lustre on her station as Grace Hunsdon?”

“Answer me one question, Charles. Do you love this girl? Don’t suffer yourself to be dazzled by her fortune, but answer me sincerely. Suppose she hadn’t a penny, would you marry her?”

"Would you think a marriage under such circumstances prudent?"

"What business is it of yours what I should think? Young fellows in love don't care what anybody thinks."

"Then I answer at once—Yes."

"You would marry her without my consent—run away with her—and, like old Marmaduke, sacrifice everything for her?"

"It is a hard question, but I answer again—Yes."

"Give me your hand, Charles. I didn't think there was this sort of heroism in you. You would desert me for this girl? I don't believe a word of it. You would come to me first, as you have done, and ask my consent—and you should have it. You could have run away with her if you pleased. Why didn't you? There—if you love her, marry her: but I make one stipulation. I will receive your wife, but hold no intercourse with her family. A man may marry a woman if he loves her—but he is not bound to marry her father and mother, and a brood of low relations."

"Your great kindness, my dear uncle——"

"You owe me no kindness. If you are resolved upon this business, let us talk of it again after dinner."

And Lord William hurried off to his club, leaving his nephew to reflect upon the conquest of the first obstacle that lay in the path to the attainment of his object. The next step was to make a formal proposal to Mr. Rawlings, for which he had partly prepared that gentleman by the note he had previously despatched to him.

When Lord Charles arrived at Park-lane, he found Mr. Rawlings waiting in his library to receive him. The interview was short, and conducted with the utmost frankness on both sides.

"My note of this morning," said Lord Charles, "in some measure anticipated the object of this visit."

"I fancy," replied Mr. Rawlings, smiling, "I am not wholly ignorant of your object; and beg you will speak unreservedly."

"Then I will be perfectly frank. From what you have seen of me, Mr. Rawlings, I trust I may lay some claim to your confidence."

"I know no man, Lord Charles, better entitled to the respect and confidence of his friends."

"I have a suit to urge that deeply affects my happiness,

and this gratifying expression of your good opinion encourages me to hope for your sanction. I confess I approach the subject with hesitation ; but as I believe my attentions to your daughter have not escaped observation——”

“ I have observed them,” said Mr. Rawlings.

“ And as you did not discourage them, I flatter myself that you will not disapprove of my desire to form an alliance with your family.”

“ Your candour, Lord Charles, would be ill-repaid by the slightest reserve on my part. I have for some time observed the marked distinction with which you have treated my daughter ; and if I entertained any objection to it, I should certainly have spoken to you on the subject. So far as my own feelings are concerned, therefore, I needn’t say that I am prepared to give the most friendly consideration to any communication you have to make.”

“ You are very kind. The truth is, I feel that your daughter is worthy of a higher station than I can offer her. Younger sons, Mr. Rawlings, are not the favourites of fortune. I assure you I reflected upon this very seriously before I could make up my mind how to act. But the wisest amongst us are not always governed by their reason in such matters. Will you pardon me for speaking so plainly ?”

“ I consider your frankness highly creditable to you.”

“ My own fortune is small—but I have some expectations from my uncle ; and I should not have presumed to propose for your daughter if I had not obtained his approval.”

“ Then you have already consulted Lord William ?”

“ He gave me his full consent this morning.”

“ You have acted prudently in making your uncle acquainted with your intention ; for I freely acknowledge his assent removes the principal difficulty I should have felt in entertaining your proposal. As to fortune, we will talk of that more at leisure. It is disagreeable to mix up pecuniary arrangements with matters of feeling.”

“ In your hands I feel secure that everything will be done with a strict regard to the interests and happiness of all parties. In the mean time, I may be permitted to hope that——”

“ We seem to have forgotten,” said Mr. Rawlings, interrupting him, “ that there is a third person concerned in this affair. My consent is all very well, but the lady—have you reason to think that the proposal will be acceptable to her ?”

"I may, perhaps, deceive myself, but I believe she is not ignorant of my feelings, or indifferent to them."

"I cannot undertake to coerce my daughter's inclinations; let me assure you, however, that if I find her not indisposed to receive your addresses, you shall have a warm advocate in her father. I do not know, for the present, what more I can say."

"I may consider myself then at liberty to speak to her?"

"No. That would be injudicious. I will take upon myself to communicate the honour you design for her. It will come with some weight and authority from me; and as I have never experienced from my dear girl a single act of disobedience—I think, Lord Charles—I hope—indeed, I have very little doubt that I may promise you her consent."

With this satisfactory disposal of his daughter, Mr. Rawlings shook hands cordially with Lord Charles Eton, who took his leave, overflowing with delight at the result of the interview.

BOOK THE FOURTH.

STILL WATERS ARE THE DEEPEST.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH THE BARONESS DE POUDRE-BLEU TAKES THE INITIATIVE.

BOUNDED on the north by Oxford-street, on the south by Piccadilly, on the west by Hyde Park, and on the east by Berkeley-square, lies the sequestered kingdom of Mayfair. Upon entering this region, you at once perceive that it is inhabited by a race whose peculiar characteristics distinguish them in a remarkable manner from the people who dwell beyond the frontiers. In its stillness and gloom it resembles the tranquil cloisters of some old monastic retreat standing silently in the midst of a populous town. The aristocratic repose of Mayfair attests the quality and mode of life of its denizens. The streets have hardly a stir in them, except when a leisurely equipage wheels out of a neighbouring stable-lane, to take up its position at the door of some solemn mansion, or when the footfall of a lounging pedestrian awakens

the lazy echoes, or the tramp of a few equestrians on their way to Rotten-row, breaks sharply on the ear. Here you are never disturbed by the bustle that pervades the surrounding districts; even the loud uproar of the tossing multitudes who, only a few streets off, smite the heavens with the thunder of eternal traffic, never penetrates to the heart of Mayfair. Here we have the most perfect image of that luxurious indolence which constitutes the exclusive charm of fashionable existence. The morning passes away like a dream, in a slumberous dalliance with the mysteries of the toilette and the boudoir; scarcely a single face is to be seen at the panes or on the flags, save an occasional lacquey, reading a newspaper at a hall-window, or standing with an air of pampered idleness at a half-opened door; and it is not until night arrives, when some grand rout invokes the inhabitants out of their houses, and fills the quiet streets with long trains of carriages, lighted up, as they discharge their company, by sundry will-o'-the-wisps in the shape of link-men, that you can form any estimate of the population of the Sleepy Hollow of Mayfair.

Squeezed up amongst the large mansions, whose dark, tall windows look dim and grand with accumulated dust (a type of the stagnation of high life), are scattered many very small houses, which in any other part of the town would be considered close and incommodious. But fashion sanctifies all inconveniences. Individuals who prefer a fine address in a dingy nook at the West End, to a free circulation of air and large rooms in any other quarter, have a clear right to indulge their taste. They have ample compensation for being choked upon a few yards of carpeting in the reflection that they breathe the same atmosphere with people of distinction, forgetting that lungs of less purity may breathe it also, making ominous gaps in the Red Book which show how strangely the aristocracy are sometimes shouldered in their own chosen seclusion.

In the drawing-room of one of these tiny houses, on a crisp morning in that season of the year when autumn is rapidly darkening and wheezing into winter, sat the Baroness de Poudre-bleu and the Hon. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke. The room was excruciatingly small, notwithstanding that the space was extended by the addition of the smaller back room which was thrown open upon it. A single bay-window, with a balcony clouded by a verandah, kept the interior, however, in such a state of continual twilight that the dimensions

were by no means apparent at first sight; and what with miniature loungers flung here and there, a few tall Elizabethan chairs with low velvet seats sprinkled about, and mirrors let in, up to the ceiling, on corners and interstitial panels, reproducing the furniture in imaginary recesses, everything was done that ingenuity could devise to give an artificial expansion to the apartment. It had, at all events, a very aristocratic air, small as it was, and its decorations were in the most expensive taste.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was what is called out of sorts. He had not been up late the night before,—he had not been indulging in any excesses,—he was too fastidious a liver to fall into any hurtful extremes. This sort of mental dyspepsia was constitutional and chronic with him; but on this occasion there was a special cause that aggravated its symptoms.

No intelligent reader, who has followed the course of this history, will suspect that Mr. Bulkeley Smirke was in love. That young gentleman looked down from a sublime height of scepticism with prodigious contempt upon such puerilities. But he was in a much worse condition. He had made up his mind to marry Margaret Rawlings, and was surprised and perplexed beyond measure at the unaccountable difficulty he found in bringing her round to listen to him. Being under a strong impression that he was conferring a great honour and distinction upon her, and that the slightest intimation of his design ought to be gratefully received, he could not comprehend how it was that she persevered in treating him with an evasive politeness that baffled his attempts to ensnare her into a private interview. He laid many traps, but was always caught in them himself. In fact, he never had five minutes of uninterrupted conversation with her, and all the skill of the baroness had been wasted on idle stratagems to effect that object.

The baroness, with her infallible penetration, saw clearly how the case stood, and took her measures accordingly. The bewitching smiles she had bestowed upon Mr. Costigan were not without a special meaning. She saw that that gentleman was in the confidence of Mr. Rawlings; and by securing a little influence over his susceptible nature, she calculated upon being able to extract some useful information from him. There was no difficulty in drawing him to her house. That was easily arranged, through the agency of Mr. Trainer; and Mr. Costigan, highly elated and agreeably perturbed by the

notice she took of him, had already paid two or three morning visits to the charming little twilight drawing-room in Mayfair. We are all of us exposed to the suggestions of vanity when a beautiful woman shows us any particular marks of distinction; and Mr. Costigan had an inflammable temperament, which was quickly set on fire by such attentions. The prominent weaknesses of his character lay in the opposite directions of the social and the romantic, and both were brought to bear upon his intercourse with the baroness. The delusion of the morning was nourished so genially by liberal libations in taverns at night, that, after a few visits, Mr. Costigan was thrown into a condition which may be appropriately described as the *delirium tremens* of the tender passion.

The baroness succeeded in extracting from him some dim revelations which were enough for her purpose. She discovered that as yet Margaret was free; and that, although Lord Charles Eton was encouraged by Mr. Rawlings, no positive move, as far as Costigan knew, had been made in that quarter. As to Henry Winston, her discernment had long since detected the hopelessness of his pretensions. Under these circumstances, and having a well-founded confidence in her superior tact, she resolved upon taking a decisive step without delay; and this step formed the subject of her present conversation with her son.

"I repeat, Bulkeley," said the baroness, "that it is your own fault. Had you taken proper advantage of your opportunities, you might, by this time, have stood in a very different position with Margaret Rawlings. But you are so eaten up with vanity and self-importance in the society of women, that one would actually suppose you expected the advances to come from them. How can you imagine any girl would have so little pride as to fall in love with a man who appears to be in love only with himself?"

"Haw!" drawled out the young man; "it's very troublesome, let me tell you, to be eternally dancing after these little chits—they do expect such a confounded deal of attention. Can't be done, I assure you."

"And so, in consulting your own ease, you let a fine fortune slip through your hands. You manage yourself badly, Bulkeley; with your personal appearance, and continental education, you might secure the best match in England; but you don't know how to set about it. It's sheer nonsense to

hope that Margaret Rawlings will throw herself at your feet. Can't you see that she is persecuted by lovers; and while you are humming and hawing, the chances are a hundred to one that somebody else will carry her off?"

"I don't think so," returned Mr. Smirke; "haven't the least apprehension of the kind."

"You're a fool, Bulkeley; and your overweening confidence will spoil everything. Now just attend to what I'm saying to you: I have reason to know that Lord Charles Eton is your rival; as to Henry Winston, it is certain that Mr. Rawlings will never hear of *him*; but it is quite another affair with Lord Charles—a man of high connexions, position, and influence. If we do not intercept him at once, this project, which I have taken such pains to mature, will be only so much precious time wasted, which neither you nor I can spare."

"My good lady," returned Bulkeley Smirke, stretching himself at full length upon a sofa, "where's the occasion to be in such a deuced hurry? I really cannot be hurried—so let the thing go on quietly. Lord Charles! poor devil; the girl despises him—I can see that with half an eye."

"I shall lose all patience with you. Your cool indifference to our situation is not to be endured. I have endeavoured to make you understand, over and over again, that we cannot sustain our present expenditure; and that, in short, something must be done, or we must break up, and go back, to live as we can, amongst outcasts and *parvenus*. I rescued you, by my own unaided efforts, from that miserable course of life to which your father's folly and wickedness condemned us, and have run myself to the last extremity to keep you up in the best society; and yet I cannot get you out of your apathy and affectation. Now, here is a fortune waiting for you; and it might wait till Doomsday, if it depended on your exertions. You have been dangling about Margaret Rawlings for months and months, and, I dare say, up to this hour, you have not made the slightest impression on her."

"Haven't I, though? Ask her."

"I *have* asked her, and tested her in every way; and my conviction is, that she doesn't believe you mean anything serious. But it is too late now to talk about that. I am determined to take a decisive step this morning, that will bring the matter to issue, one way or the other."

The indolent young gentleman knew very well that when his mother had determined to take a decisive step, no in-

fluence which he possessed (or anybody else) could turn her aside. He had not seen her in such a mood for a considerable time. The sun had been shining on her, and the gay society in which she had been mixed up had drawn out the fascinating side of her character; but she had suddenly come to a full stop, and the latent energy and dark passions, which had slept all this time under the brilliant surface of daily excitements, were now called up into the fiercest activity. So long as she thought the affair likely to make a favourable progress, by constantly spurring the sluggish genius of her son, and filling Margaret's ears with praises of him, she was willing to trust to time and circumstances rather than risk the result by any hasty measure; but the moment she discovered that there was imminent danger of a powerful interloper stepping in, and frustrating her long-cherished plans, she resolved to stake the whole game upon one desperate chance. When the baroness was worked up to this point of violent decision, it was notified to those who knew her well by the clenching of her vermilion lips with a downward spasm, which, while it lasted, utterly changed the expression of her face. There, at this instant, was the knitted mouth and the ominous curve. Mr. Bulkeley Smirke saw it plainly, and knew what it meant, and became as grave as if he had been lifted out of the drawing-room and dropped into the dock of the Old Bailey. There was no trifling with the purpose of that clenched mouth, so sweet and entrancing when it smiled, so bitter and menacing when it collapsed.

"I am quite willing," said the young gentleman, rather alarmed, "to do anything you suggest."

"I wish you had been willing to do it a little sooner," returned the baroness; "there is not an hour to be lost. I have ordered the carriage at one o'clock to drive over to the Rawlingses."

"To-day! Why, what do you mean to do?"

"To make a proposal in your name for Margaret Rawlings?"

"You don't mean that?"

"I will do it. Don't put yourself out of the way to express astonishment. Dress yourself, and be ready to come with me."

"I? You frighten me. Can't it be done without me?"

"Bulkeley," said the baroness, starting out of her chair, and throwing her head back with a look of stern reproof, "matters have come to this point between us, that I am de-

terminated to sacrifice myself no longer to your vanity and selfishness. Instead of availing yourself of your opportunities, you have thwarted and frustrated me at every turn. Now, mark my words. This is your last chance. If we fail to-day, through the contemptuous indifference with which you have treated Miss Rawlings, I have done with you, and for the future you must work your own way in the world. You are a fop and a fool; but, perhaps, when you find yourself a beggar, you will think it necessary to make some exertion."

"Really, you are too severe. I assure you I have done everything a gentleman can be expected to do in such a case. I follow the girl like a shadow, but she's always so engrossed, that—just consider my position; one naturally looks for a little consideration from people of their class."

"Yes—you *have* followed her like a shadow, without a tongue or brains in your head. Women don't like such shadows. Engrossed, indeed! Why do you allow her to be engrossed? Why don't you engross her yourself? And you must sneer, too, at their birth, and set up a position which you haven't a penny to support. One word more, sir; should this move break down, I will throw you on your father's family—who have never done me the honour to recognise me since the death of Colonel Smirke. We shall see what your position will do for you then."

"Positively, that's too bad. My father's family wont own me. I don't know one of them even by sight; and, considering that I am ready to do anything you wish——"

"You shall be put to the test. You shall go with me to Park-lane, and I will ensure you for once that Margaret shall not be engrossed. When you are alone with her, make your declaration; and you may tell her that your future life depends upon the result, which will be no more than the truth. I will open the business to her father myself. It is a bold situation—I will do my part, and let me see that you do yours. Now don't fidget me by saying any more. It is half-past twelve."

"But suppose they shouldn't be at home?"

"I have already taken care of that by making an appointment. Do you think it likely I would trust such an affair to accident?"

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke knew it was fruitless to expostulate, and withdrew to make his toilette in a state of trepidation

which strangely disturbed the balance of his frigid temperament. These young men who set up grand airs to young ladies are sometimes horribly frightened when they come suddenly face to face with a crisis of this kind. The meek, timid, gentle Margaret Rawlings, whom he had hitherto treated with such *hauteur*, now seemed the most formidable person in the world. He would rather have entered the cage of a hyena in the Zoological Gardens than have encountered her on this occasion. But there was no help for it, and so he went through the process of dressing mechanically, and at one o'clock he was seated with the baroness in the carriage (of which he had a misgiving that he was soon to see the last) on their way to Park-lane.

It was a very dismal drive. Not a word was spoken by either of them. Here were a mother and her son going to make a proposal of marriage, plunged in a sullen reverie, and shutting up their sympathies from each other in a repulsive silence. What strange comedies, tragedies, and farces are acted in the pretty equipages we see moving through the streets, if we could only find them out; what flurried hearts beat under the smiling faces that look so brightly through the windows; what rankling antipathies are festering between the handsome pair that are lolling back with such apparent *abandon* on their way to a dinner-party or the Opera; what perjury is maturing itself in the disloyal thoughts of that beautiful woman who sits with such animated radiance by the side of her unsuspecting lord, from whose home she is laying the plan of an elopement to be decided before the night is over; what concealed stratagems, suppressed devotion, what fears, hopes, joys, and miseries are enclosed in those painted vehicles which transport their freights of human emotion so pleasantly from street to street and from house to house! It is as well, perhaps, for our own comfort that we should be deceived by the surface of these gay appearances, and think that they are all as happy and careless as they look. What would become of our reliance on the close confidences in which we have garnered up our affections, if the perfidies that are scattered so thickly round us were to be laid bare to our gaze?

When they reached Park-lane, the vivacity of the baroness sparkled out as brilliantly as if nothing had happened, or was about to happen. The most acute observer of character could not have detected in her manner or her features the slightest trace of the anxiety that lay heavily upon her mind. She

grasped Mrs. Rawlings by both hands, made the girls laugh with a sprightly anecdote of some *contretemps* that occurred at a rout the night before, and altogether was in so wonderful a flow of high spirits, that Mr. Bulkeley Snirke, who had a large experience of her consummate powers of acting, was rather appalled at the exhibition she made under such trying circumstances. For his part, he was fairly paralysed. His tongue dried up, and he felt himself every now and then gulping an hysterical cough which wanted to come to his relief, but which he was afraid to encourage; and when he saw the baroness disengage Margaret from the others, and whisper to her at the window, his heart began to palpitate to an alarming degree. At length the awful moment arrived. With inimitable tact, the baroness contrived to want to look at something in Mrs. Rawlings' boudoir, and in a flash of gaiety carried her and Clara off. Bulkeley was left alone with Margaret. It was done in a moment. He didn't know how it was done. They seemed to have vanished in a mist, through which everything in the room swam and undulated in a delirious manner. While he is endeavouring to collect his scattered faculties, we will follow the baroness.

Having got the ladies into the boudoir, she took care to keep them there long enough to give Bulkeley time to make his declaration. She was so prodigious a favourite with Mrs. Rawlings, that she had no difficulty in detaining her; but Clara, out of an instinctive desire to relieve Margaret from a *tête-à-tête* which she knew was not very agreeable to her, made two or three attempts to get away. She might as well have saved herself the trouble; for every time she moved, the baroness had something fresh to say which she was obliged to stay and listen to, and thus a full half-hour was consumed.

"I am really quite vexed with myself," said the baroness, looking at her watch with an air of consternation, "to think that I should sit chattering with you here, and keep Mr. Rawlings waiting for me all this time. You know I told you in my note I had something particular to talk to him about."

"Oh! yes," replied Clara; "papa is in his library expecting you; but, my dear baroness, he says that he can't stay very long, for he wants to go down to the House."

"You mustn't be jealous," cried the baroness, addressing Mrs. Rawlings with an ineffable smile; "it's only a little secret between Mr. Rawlings and me, my dear: you shall know all about it by-and-by. So, I'll run down to him—

don't trouble yourselves—I know the room—I will come back to you presently, and perhaps have a discovery for you that will surprise you.”

Then, leaving the ladies to wonder what it could all be about, she glided down the stairs, and making the softest, coquettish little tap imaginable at the door of the library, was desired in a low, icy voice, to come in.

She found Mr. Rawlings alone. He handed her a chair rather ceremoniously. His manner was cold, almost freezing, and for an instant it had a refrigerating effect upon her spirits; but she rapidly brightened up, and, with a delicious tinge of confusion playing over her face, she opened her communication.

“I have been very anxious to have a little confidential conversation with you, Mr. Rawlings, and ventured to make my own appointment this morning. I hope——”

“I am at your service, baroness; pray go on.”

“I needn't tell you that I have seen a good deal of society; and I must say, without the least flattery, that in the round of my tolerably wide circle of friends, there are none in whom I feel so deep an interest as your charming family. Indeed, if I dare give way to my feelings, I love those dear girls of yours just as much as if they were my own; they are so sincere, and affectionate, and well-principled. Ah! that is the great want of the present day. Our society is so artificial, so much upon the surface, that I really should be at a loss to find two young ladies whose minds and morals have been so carefully trained.”

“I am afraid such specimens are rather rare, baroness,” returned Mr. Rawlings, drawing his right hand slowly over his chin.

“I am quite enthusiastic about them, and cite them wherever I go as models for all the young people of my acquaintance.”

“They are much indebted to your good opinion,” said Mr. Rawlings, gazing with a straight, inquiring look into the eyes of the baroness.

“Well—I hope you'll not be surprised at what I am going to say. Indeed, I suspect you anticipate my little secret—for it is a secret yet, I assure you; I haven't breathed it even to my dear Mrs. Rawlings, although we are as confidential as sisters;” and the baroness dipped her head with a playful smile, that might have furnished Mr. Rawlings with a fair

excuse for suffering himself to be seduced on the instant from his severity. But he did not relax a muscle.

"You give me credit for more penetration than I possess," he quietly answered; "and if it will be any satisfaction to you, I promise not to be surprised at anything you say."

"Can you guess nothing?" and the smile played more bewitchingly than before.

"I have no talent for conundrums, particularly where ladies are concerned. Will you be good enough to explain yourself."

"I declare you men are terrible creatures, you do so force us to come to the point, instead of helping us a little, and we are such very shallow diplomatists. Well, then, the truth is, Mr. Rawlings, I am not the only person in the world that has fallen in love with your daughters."

"That I think very probable, baroness."

"And a certain young gentleman, who, from his position,—and don't accuse me of blind partiality if I add, his personal merits,—would be considered eligible in the best families, has formed an attachment for your younger daughter."

"Indeed!"

"Poor fellow! It preyed terribly on his health before I discovered it, and when I found out what was the matter with him, I thought the most prudent thing I could do was to have a little private conversation with you on the subject."

"I applaud your discretion. You have acted very properly."

"Oh! my dear sir, how could I act otherwise? My feeling and my principles naturally led me to consult you at once on a matter in which we are both so deeply concerned."

"Oh!—then we are both concerned in it?"

"Now, do you really pretend not to know who I mean?" said the baroness in her softest tone, throwing an angelical side look, full of banter and fascination, full upon Mr. Rawlings' face. Up to this point he had stood fire like a veteran; but this focal light was too much for him, and he could not repress a contraband smile that made its appearance round the corners of his mouth.

"How can I tell who you mean? Come, baroness, who is it?"

"Why, my Bulkeley, to be sure—the dear boy!"

"Mr. Bulkeley Smirke?" rejoined Mr. Rawlings, in an ambiguous voice which the baroness was much at a loss to interpret one way or the other.

"I am very much opposed, myself, to early marriages, Mr.

Rawlings," observed the baroness; "and I dare say so are you."

"Well—I am; but we must be guided by circumstances in such cases."

"Exactly so—that's precisely what I feel in this case; for I confess I am so interested in these young people, that I couldn't find it in my heart to throw any impediment in the way of their happiness."

"Very kind and considerate in you, baroness."

"I knew you would agree with me," exclaimed the baroness, in a livelier tone, clearing her voice, and confident of the issue; "my boy, Mr. Rawlings, has been brought up under my own eyes, and, making all allowances for the affection of a mother, you may believe me when I assure you that he is very unlike the young men of the present day."

"I believe it," replied Mr. Rawlings.

"I am delighted that you think so. I can truly say that he has never given me a moment's uneasiness. Indeed, he is amiable to a fault; and, when we take his prospects into consideration, it is wonderful how free he is from pride or pretensions of any kind."

"Prospects?" inquired Mr. Rawlings.

"Don't you know that he is heir presumptive to the Huxley title and estates? Oh! yes—Lord Huxley has only one child, a weak, sickly boy—and, although I hope I am not so uncharitable as to wish such a thing, even for Bulkeley's sake, it would be next to a miracle if that boy should ever come to be Lord Huxley. With such a prospect before him, what do you say, my dear Mr. Rawlings? Is there any reason why Bulkeley Smirke should not aspire to the hand of a young lady in whose heart he has created an interest?"

"None in the world, that I can see, baroness."

"What an excellent man you are, my dear, dear Mr. Rawlings. But I mustn't spoil you with my raptures. Poor Bulkeley! he will be out of his mind with joy when he hears now kindly you have spoken of him; and he is at this moment in a state, I have no doubt, of considerable agitation with our darling Margaret in the drawing-room."

"With Margaret in the drawing-room?"

"I left them together, very anxious, as you may suppose."

"Don't you think we had better send for him?"

"Oh! by all means—it is very good and thoughtful of you!"

Mr. Rawlings rang the bell, and desired a servant to request Mr. Bulkeley Smirke's presence in the library.

In a few minutes that young gentleman made his appearance, which fully justified his mother's description. He looked white with fear, and a cold dew was distilling itself all over his body: he had much more the aspect of a culprit coming up for judgment, than of a lover fresh from an interview with his mistress. The fact was, that during the half-hour with Margaret, he had made so little progress towards a declaration, that the young lady at last saved him the trouble, and frankly told him that he might spare himself and her the pain of alluding to a topic so extremely distasteful to her. In short, she rejected him in unmistakeable terms, and he would have run out of the house at once, if the greater fear of his mother had not compelled him to abide the result of the negotiation which, to his horror, he knew was going on below stairs.

"Pray take a chair, Mr. Smirke," said Mr. Rawlings.

"Thank you," replied Mr. Smirke, trying to rally, and drying his face with a white pocket-handkerchief; "it is intolerably hot to-day."

"The baroness has been letting me into a little secret, Mr. Smirke, which, I must say, has taken me rather by surprise."

"But you must first let me tell him how very, very kind you have been about it—the poor fellow is so agitated! You have no notion how kind Mr. Rawlings has been, Bulkeley,—but there now, go on!" she added, coaxing Mr. Rawlings' forefinger, which happened to be resting on the table, with a gentle pressure of her hand,—"go on! I will not interrupt you again."

"Well, you know I am a man of business," continued Mr. Rawlings, "and you must allow me to be perfectly candid with you. I thought the best thing I could do, was to give you my answer at once, and spare you any unnecessary suspense."

"So considerate of your feelings, Bulkeley!" observed the baroness.

"My answer is this—that I am sure my daughter must feel highly flattered, and all that; but I am sorry to say there is an insuperable obstacle in the way."

"Mr. Rawlings!" exclaimed the baroness.

"I recommend you, therefore, as a friend, to think no more of my daughter; for I will not delude you by holding out the least expectation that I shall alter my present determination. In plain words, Mr. Smirke, I must decline the honour of

your connexion, and distinctly request that you will not, under any circumstances, renew the proposal either to me or my daughter."

At the conclusion of these words Mr. Rawlings rose from his chair—indeed, they all rose at the same moment, for the meeting was at an end.

Mr. Bulkeley Smirke cast a woful glance at his mother, in which reproach for this bitter humiliation struggled hard against his fear of the consequences with which she had threatened him. As for the baroness, she was wrought up to a pitch of indignation that showed itself in crimson on her forehead, and produced in perfection that clenched curve of the mouth in which was legibly written the fiery characters of scorn and resentment. But she controlled herself; for, enraged as she was by the annihilation of her project, she was too politic to quarrel with the Rawlings family.

"Very well, Mr. Rawlings," she cried; "that is your answer. Of course it is a serious disappointment to my poor Bulkeley—of course—and, I think, you ought to have confided it to me, so that I might have broken it rather more gently to him. You certainly did not lead me to suppose that such was your decision. However, if you have other views for your daughter, I am sure I love the dear girl too well not to hope that she may find a husband who will make her as happy as—as—Bulkeley would have done. I wish you good morning, Mr. Rawlings."

"Good morning," returned Mr. Rawlings, seeing them to the door, which he held open for them till they had passed into the hall.

The baroness did not run up to Mrs. Rawlings as she had promised, but hastened into her carriage, which conveyed the mother and son back to Mayfair in a condition of still greater exasperation and excitement than they had started in the morning.

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING SOME OF THE ROCKS AND QUICKSANDS IN THE STREAM OF
TRUE LOVE.

MR. RAWLINGS resumed his seat, and took up a newspaper that lay upon the table. But he didn't read a word of it. His thoughts were out on many excursions amongst the memories of past years and the projects of the time to come.

He ran over the strange incidents that rose up like landmarks on his progress,—the deathbed secret of old Raggles, in which lay the germ of much of that prosperity which had since grown up so luxuriantly,—the solitary walk on the bright winter morning, when the fixed purpose of his life, which he had subsequently carried out with such inflexible perseverance, first took clear and full possession of him,—the triumph over the Dragonfelts, crowned by the recent apparition of Lord Valteline, who had come to him in a state of premature decay of mind and body to raise fresh loans on his estates,—the pomp by which he was now surrounded,—the influence he wielded,—the alliance with Lord Charles,—and then the sudden contrast between all this wealth and power and the wretchedness and destitution of his boyhood, the squalor, suffering, and contumely through which he had worked his way, the companionships he had outstripped and left grovelling behind him, the associations he had formed, and the boundless visions of acquisition that yet lay floating before him. The rapidity with which the mind surveys and re-enacts the events of a lifetime is one of those psychological mysteries which may be set aside for inquiry with the phenomena of dreams, when the world shall have been broken up and man resolved into his spiritual elements. We have no clue to that electric association of ideas by which such a multitude of distinct images are called up all at once, or in a succession of bewildering velocity that baffles all speculation. Certain it is, however, that in a few seconds of time a man lives over again the actions of many years; and that five minutes had not elapsed after the departure of the baroness, when Mr. Rawlings had completed the retrospect of his career and projected its results far into the future. It was only the day before that he had accepted the proposal of Lord Charles Eton; and having now rejected Mr. Bulkeley Smirke, it was necessary to carry into execution without further delay the course he had resolved upon. He proceeded for that purpose to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Rawlings and her daughters.

Mr. Rawlings was not accustomed to use much ceremony in his communications with his family. Brevity was a habit with him. His occupations afforded him little time to waste upon words, and action was more consonant with his peremptory will. The exordium on this occasion was short as usual, grave as the matter was which he had to announce.

"You have seen Mr. Bulkeley Smirke this morning, Margaret?"

"I have, sir."

"He has made a proposal of marriage for you."

Margaret hung her head, and Mrs. Rawlings and Clara looked at each other in profound astonishment, for Margaret had been too much frightened to say a word to them about it.

"The baroness, it seems," continued Mr. Rawlings, "was of opinion that you favoured his addresses. Is that true?"

"No, sir. I never gave him the least encouragement."

"I thought so, and I have relieved you from his future importunities by dismissing him. You will not be troubled with him again."

A great load was taken off Margaret's heart; not that she could have supposed, if she had given herself time to reflect, that her father would have acted otherwise; but she had not reflected at all, and was oppressed by a vague terror that rendered her incapable of thinking clearly.

"My daughter," said Mr. Rawlings, "is not to be thrown away upon an empty coxcomb, who has not a single qualification to recommend him to any woman of sense. She must have a husband worthy of her." Here he took her hand, which shook violently, and went on: "come, don't be alarmed, I have something more agreeable to tell you."

"Sir!" gasped out Margaret. She knew as well as if he had spoken it what was coming. She saw it in the resolved yet not unkindly expression of his eyes.

"I have had another proposal for you."

"Another?"

"Not such a popinjay as Smirke, but a man of station and high character. Why do you tremble, child? Is it so dreadful that a man whose alliance would be considered an honour by any lady in England should propose for you?"

"No—sir—no—I am very grateful for his good opinion—but I never thought—indeed—I——"

"Well—well—of course you never thought about it; but you must think about it now. I need not tell you that I am proud of you and your sister, and that I have always looked forward to see you both well provided for. But this piece of good fortune—which you owe entirely to your own merits—exceeds my most sanguine expectations; and it will be the happiest hour of my life when you become the wife of Lord Charles Eton."

Margaret trembled violently, and grew deadly pale.

"My darling! What is it?" exclaimed Clara, throwing her arms round her; "there—there—love,—it is only a proposal after all, you know, and all papa asks you is to think about it. Papa, it is very wrong of you to be so abrupt with her. It is, indeed,—very wrong."

"Silence, Clara. Let Margaret answer for herself."

Margaret made a great effort to control her emotions, and flinging herself on her knees before her father, looked up beseechingly into his face.

"Dear papa—oh! forgive me—I have never disobeyed you—I know my duty—but this is not possible—I esteem and respect Lord Charles, indeed I do—but love him? No, no—you would not make me wretched——"

"Margaret," said Mr. Rawlings, raising her from the ground, "we will talk about this another time. Reflect upon what I have said to you. These foolish notions must not be allowed to interfere with your settlement in life. I expect that you will seriously consider this affair, and be prepared to receive Lord Charles Eton as your future husband. I have sanctioned his visits to this house as your accepted suitor."

"Before you had even spoken to Margaret about it?" demanded Clara.

"Clara, I desire you to be silent; and let me see that you interfere no further. Margaret must be governed by my advice; be careful how you estrange her from her duty."

"I have always tried to do my duty," murmured Margaret, Mrs. Rawlings standing behind her, and trying to soothe all parties by a low cry of "Hush! hush!"

"And you will still do your duty, Margaret. Look to me alone for guidance and protection; and the reward of your obedience shall be a position in society which in your childhood nobody could have anticipated for you. It is for this I have toiled and laboured, and sacrificed my own ease and comfort to a life of incessant fatigue and anxiety. You will not disappoint me in the end—for it is my ambition as well as your own you will advance by this marriage. You ought to exult in it, child, and feel yourself very much flattered, and of course you will when you have thought more seriously about it. There, I will say no more to you now; but I expect that you will observe my wishes in the reception of Lord Charles Eton?"

Strengthening the last few words with a quiet look of parental authority, Mr. Rawlings left the room.

Throughout this little scene, Mrs. Rawlings had taken no part beyond that of betraying extreme uneasiness, and endeavouring to conciliate everybody by deprecating excessive emotions on both sides. But now Mr. Rawlings was gone, she thought it necessary to assume more active functions.

"My dear child," she said to Margaret, "what in the world could have thrown you into such a flutter. Why, my dear, it's a wonderful match. Think what everybody will say down at Yarlton when they hear that you have sprung up into Lady Charles Eton? How Old Pogeys will stare; and won't the Winstons be astonished?"

"Don't talk to me, mamma!" said Margaret, whose two hands were clasped in Clara's, who was rubbing them very diligently as if the poor child were cold, although at that moment she had all the symptoms of a high fever.

Mrs. Rawlings could not understand Margaret's extraordinary sensibility on this matter. For her part she always sided with the strong and the wonderful, except when the romantic elements of her nature happened to seduce her the other way; but as she was entirely ignorant of the attachment between Margaret and Henry Winston, she could see no reason why Margaret, instead of being made miserable by his lordship's proposal, wasn't lifted up into an ecstasy by it. Now Clara was quite as ignorant of the attachment as her mamma, but her quick sympathy penetrated the mystery in an instant, and she saw clearly that this sudden emotion gushed out of some feeling which Margaret had hitherto hidden from her.

Mrs. Rawlings ran on with a provoking panegyric on Lord Charles, and Margaret listened to her in a sort of trance, while Clara, who did not hear one word of her mamma's well-meant rattle, kept her eyes fixed upon her sister, as if she were trying to read her thoughts.

"Don't say any more to me to-day, mamma," said Margaret. "I shall be better by-and-by. Dear mamma, you have always been so kind to me," and she leaned over and kissed her; "I know you will indulge me. I am a little nervous, that's all."

"The best thing you can do, my dear, is to come out and take a drive. The air will revive you."

"No—no—not to-day. Let me be quiet. I will go to my room. Will you come with me, Clara?"

Mrs. Rawlings good-naturedly gave up the point, and the sisters withdrew.

When they got into the room, Margaract looked at Clara for a moment, and flinging herself into her arms, burst into tears.

"Clara!" she exclaimed, "I am very wretched."

"Do not agitate yourself, darling," said Clara; "confide in me—tell me what it is—your own Clara, that loves you better than all the world."

"I know it, and it was that made me conceal my misery from you. I was afraid that your love for me might make you do something that would irritate papa, and I could not bear to be the cause of dissension between you. But you will promise me, my own, own Clara, for my sake, that you will restrain your feelings—papa is so severe."

"Well—there—you needn't be afraid. I'm sure papa will never force either of us to forget our duty to him. Sit down, now, and tell me everything."

"I never had a concealment from you before—never in my whole life. My heart was open to you—but I had a terrible fear upon me; and what I feared has happened. Dearest Clara—I know not how to tell you—but I cannot marry Lord Charles Eton."

"You do not like him?"

"I dare not deceive you. Oh! comfort me—comfort me, sister. I look up to you as to a being of a higher nature—strong and courageous, and true and sweet and affectionate in your strength. Where shall I look for consolation if you cannot give it to me? To marry a man I do not love, and consign another to misery—no—no!"

"Another, Margaret? Then I was right in my conjecture."

"You guessed it, dear Clara? I wonder you did not see it long ago. But Rose knows of it. I could not keep it from her, because——"

"I see it all, darling—I see it all. What a stupid creature I am to be so blind. And my poor Margaret has had this terrible secret shut up in her heart, and nobody to comfort her! We must see what can be done. Patience—patience, love, and all will be well yet."

"What blessed words you speak to me! Your very voice is full of hope and encouragement, and I feel lighter and happier since this burden is off my heart. But, Clara—"

Clara—when I think of my father! What will he say to me?"

"Oh! he must be reasonable. Remember, dear Margaret, that he is ignorant of your attachment, and when he hears of it, he will never be so barbarous as to sacrifice you. He must not—he shall not. Even if he refuses his consent to Henry—for of course it is Henry Winston—you know he cannot force you to marry Lord Charles. Cheer up, love—the case is not so desperate as you imagine. But how did all this come about?"

"I hardly know. It grew upon me without my being conscious of it. I can give you no explanation, dear Clara, except that when I discovered the state of his feelings I became aware, for the first time, of the interest I felt in him. Circumstances brought it all out, and hurried us on. The visits of Lord Charles made him miserable, and he was losing his health, and growing reckless about himself—and—and—what could I do? Rose thought it cruel in me to let him suffer in that way—and so, at last, I listened to him, and my heart betrayed itself—and, there now, you have the whole confession."

"But did you suspect that papa had any thought of Lord Charles?"

"Henry found it out by the strangest accident through Mr. Costigan. The discovery, of course, only made him the more urgent, and that was not the moment for me to retract."

"Retract? Why should you retract? We were all children together, and I love Henry Winston as if he were my own brother. It would not be worthy of my true-hearted Margaret to forsake the companion of her childhood for the best lord of them all. Courage—courage—you have given your heart to Henry Winston, and he is deserving of it,—if any man is deserving of such a treasure;—you must not give your hand to Lord Charles."

The conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door. Henry Winston was in the drawing-room. Margaret was too much agitated for an interview at that moment, and entreated Clara to break the dreadful news to him; but, after some little debate, she yielded to Clara's persuasions, and they went down together.

Henry had a letter in his hand from Rose, who had left town the week before. And such a letter as it was, full of loving artifices and cogent arguments on behalf of him who

presented it,—and such pictures of love in cottages, living on roses and honeysuckles,—and such protests against the hollowness and insincerity of a town life,—and such passionate petitions to Margaret to make up her mind, like a good, sweet girl, as she was, and come down to the country to be married on the same day that Rose was to be married herself, although that happy day was still as remote and indefinite as ever! This revolutionary epistle, as luck would have it, came at a very unfortunate crisis, and, to mend the matter, Henry happened to be in unusually high spirits, as if it were the destiny of love to have the poignancy of its little miseries enhanced by untoward accidents. The valorous Clara opened the business.

“I know everything, Henry,” she said; “so that you may speak freely before me. But I have something to tell you that I am afraid will make you very unhappy. You must bear it patiently for Margaret’s sake. If *you* give way, you cannot expect her to be able to sustain herself. Her reliance is upon you, and you must set her an example of fortitude.”

“I will be patient, Clara. You may trust me—I am prepared to endure anything for her sake.” His voice did not altogether bear out the heroism of this declaration, for it faltered very perceptibly.

Clara having, in the gentlest way she could, broken the sad intelligence to him, the unfortunate lover gave immediate proof that the preparations he had made for enduring the calamity were not quite so perfect as he had flattered himself. He flung himself upon a sofa, buried his head in his hands, swore he would shoot Lord Charles, and had recourse to many wild and incoherent expressions, which greatly alarmed the ladies. Indeed, he did not show half as much courage and resolution as Margaret, who, crushed as she was by this overwhelming sorrow, bore it with a sweet and calm resignation that shamed his intemperance.

There is no faith to be placed in violence. It seldom strikes its object, and more frequently recoils and shatters the hand that launches it; while calm reason survives all turbulence of passion, and is steadfast in its course, when violence has wasted its strength and is beaten down.

Clara endeavoured to make Henry Winston see that he would only involve himself in worse consequences by entering upon hostilities with Lord Charles, and succeeded at last in extracting a promise from him that, let what might happen, he would take no foolish step of that sort. He was very re-

luctant to give up the satisfaction of a terrible revenge, for he was impressed with a conviction that Lord Charles had acted perfidiously towards him, that he must have been aware of his attachment for Margaret, and that his first duty, as a man of honour, was to give way to the prior claims of his friend. If, therefore, he relinquished his design of shooting him, an act which he would have performed with immense pleasure, it was only to nurse his hatred with tenfold bitterness for some future day. In the midst of this exciting conversation, while Henry was yet flushed with fury and despair, the door of the drawing-room opened, and, to the undisguised consternation of the lovers and their *confidante*, Mr. Rawlings walked in.

He saw the real state of affairs at a glance. The whole story was palpably revealed in the red eyes and crimson cheeks of the delinquents. He had suspected it before, and his suspicions were now resolved into certainty.

"What is the meaning of all this?" he inquired.

There was no answer. Clara was going to say something very bold on the impulse of her impetuous feelings, but she was prudent enough to check herself.

"I speak to *you*, Mr. Winston," resumed Mr. Rawlings, laying a special emphasis on the formal appellation, which he had never used to him before. "Will you be good enough to explain the meaning of all this?"

"Sir!" exclaimed Henry; "nothing, sir—nothing."

"Young gentleman," returned Mr. Rawlings, with a freezing severity of tone, "when you were admitted as a visitor in this house, it never occurred to me to suspect that you would take advantage of our hospitality to abuse my confidence. You have deceived me."

"These are harsh words, Mr. Rawlings," said Henry, colouring up.

"I will not pick and choose my words for the sake of sparing your feelings. No language is too strong to express my opinion of your conduct."

"There is nothing, sir, in my conduct that I am not ready to avow and justify," cried Henry, passionately.

"Henry!—Henry!" exclaimed Clara.

"Justify?" observed Mr. Rawlings; "by what right, sir, do you presume to step between me and my daughter?"

"What have I done, sir?"

"Quite enough to put an end to your intercourse with my family, Mr. Winston."

"Oh! papa," urged Clara, "do not be so cruel to poor Henry. Dear papa, that was spoken in anger. I'm sure you will recal it."

"Clara, if you value your sister's happiness, you will interfere no further. You have already busied yourself too much to-day in this matter. I ask you again, sir, what was the meaning of your alarm and agitation when I came into the room? What was the subject of your conversation? If your conduct be open and honourable, why don't you explain it."

Henry Winston looked at Margaret; but she averted her face, and their confusion became more and more apparent, as Mr. Rawlings scrutinized them alternately.

"Your silence is a confession of guilt. You have been counselling my daughter to forget what is due to herself, and to violate her duty to me."

"You wrong me, sir. Margaret, shall I speak?"

"Yes, you had better, Henry," exclaimed Clara, seizing Margaret's hand, and standing firmly by her side. "Tell papa the truth. Courage, love," she added, turning to Margaret, "there is nothing to fear."

"Again?" said Mr. Rawlings, looking angrily at Clara.

"I acknowledge," said Henry Winston, "that your censure is just, if it be a crime in me to love one of whom I am every way so unworthy."

"Crime!" repeated Clara, with a slight expression of reproof.

"I hope you will make allowances, sir. I have known her all my life—how could I know her, sir, and not love her? It is quite true I have no pretensions to aspire to her now—but this feeling existed long before she was elevated so far above me. If I had millions it would be the same; I would cast them at her feet."

"Your conduct admits of no palliation," said Mr. Rawlings. "When you made this discovery of your feelings, you were bound to ascertain whether her family would sanction your pretensions; but, instead of taking that honourable course, you meanly availed yourself of your intimacy here to promote your own selfish objects, at the cost, perhaps, of her happiness for life."

"Margaret—I appeal to you—speak one word for me. Selfish objects! This is cruel—I, who would sacrifice my life for her!"

"These fine speeches, Mr. Winston, are out of place in my presence, and I beg you will not repeat them. Are you so mad as to suppose that I should ever consent to such a thing—a boy, without resources, profession, or prospect? Of course you calculated on her fortune. The world gives me credit for being a rich man, and takes it for granted that my daughters will have great fortunes. Undeceive yourself. If she marries without my approbation, she will leave my house a beggar and an outcast."

There was a dead pause; the young ladies standing apart, and Henry not knowing exactly what he ought to say or do. Finding that nobody spoke, Mr. Rawlings resumed.

"I have to desire that you will henceforth consider my daughter an utter stranger. Let me have no more of this. I have other views for her, and am resolved that her prospects in life shall not be blighted by an union that would consign her to want and obscurity."

"Margaret—you hear that?"

"I cannot speak to you now, Henry," she cried, in a stifled voice.

"If you have anything to say, Margaret," interposed Mr. Rawlings, "you had better say it at once; for you are not very likely to see this gentleman again. You will thank me hereafter, Margaret, for what seems to you now an act of severity."

"Papa!" cried Clara, who, in spite of all admonitions, could not restrain her feelings, "how can you expect that she should say anything unkind to Henry Winston?"

"You will compel me, Clara, to curb this temper of yours. If Margaret has anything to say, let her speak."

"What should I say, sir?" inquired Margaret.

"That your hand is already engaged. Dismiss Mr. Winston as civilly as you please, but let him know from your own lips, that the acquaintance is terminated."

"Sister!" cried Margaret, turning imploringly to Clara, who merely bit her lip, with an expression of high resentment.

"Well?" demanded Mr. Rawlings.

Margaret paused for a moment, drew herself up with a great struggle, and exclaimed, in a low, broken tone, "I cannot say it."

The words were scarcely spoken, when Henry Winston rushed forward, and flung himself at Margaret's feet. He

thought of nothing but her truth, and the trial to which she was exposed on his account.

"That one word has saved me! Only believe that I loved you for your own sake alone—that no mean thought ever sullied my devotion—and I am happy! You acquit me of that—I see you do. Thank you, and bless you!"

Having uttered these impassioned sentences with a fervour that took even Mr. Rawlings by surprise, and ended them by a shower of eager kisses on her hand, he started to his feet, and addressed himself to the obdurate father, who stood sternly gazing on the scene.

"You have desired me, sir, to leave your house. I am ready to obey you. But suffer me, before I go, to say that you have done me a grievous injustice. I should despise myself more heartily than you can do, were I guilty of the base design you charge me with. She knows how untrue it is. Poverty, sir, would be welcome to me with her."

A grim smile passed over Mr. Rawlings' face at these words.

"You talk like a child," he observed; "when you grow up to be a man, you will see and repent your folly. I suppose you have nothing more to say?"

"I wish, sir, to say, that if I have interested Miss Rawlings' feelings, I know my duty to her, and no consideration on earth shall ever induce me to abandon it. You may forbid me your house, sir; but, so long as her happiness is at stake, you can exact nothing more from me. I will leave it in no person's power hereafter to accuse me of duplicity."

"H—a—um!" rejoined Mr. Rawlings, fixing a penetrating glance upon Henry; "you have now, I presume, said everything you had to say?"

"Everything, sir."

"Then you will do me the favour to withdraw."

Henry took up his hat, grasped Margaret and Clara by the hands, and, bowing to Mr. Rawlings, nearly stumbled over a chair in his hurry to get out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

SLIGHTLY ROMANTIC.

CHRISTMAS came in due course. Parliament was prorogued, and the fashionable world, like a covey of birds into which a shot has been suddenly discharged, took wing and dispersed

in a hundred different directions. London, notwithstanding, looked bustling enough—particularly in the neighbourhood of the poulterers' shops; but few people of mark remained in town, except people like Sir Peter Jinks, who may be considered perennial metropolitans, and who discharge their duties to the annual festival by gathering their families together at a great dinner on the 25th of December, and resuming their business punctually at ten o'clock on the morning of the 26th. The country appears to be understood on all hands to be the proper site for Christmas enjoyments. Everybody who can, goes to the country at that season, and many who cannot, pretend to go for the sake of appearances. A paragraph in the *Morning Post* announced that the Baroness de Poudrebleu had left town to spend the Christmas in Berkshire; but some of her good-natured friends confidently asserted that she remained the whole time shut up in her nutshell in Mayfair.

Mr. Rawlings went into Norfolk, where he had recently purchased a princely estate, called Ravensdale. By an immediate change of scene, and a houseful of pleasant company, amongst the rest Lord Charles Eton, he hoped to dissipate Margaret's feelings, and reconcile her to his commands. He had never spoken to her on the subject after the dismissal of Henry Winston—silence being more oppressive and authoritative than the angriest remonstrances. He left the rest to time and Lord Charles, whose position was now favoured by the most auspicious opportunities.

There was a tranquil terrace at Ravensdale, looking down upon an extensive park, dotted and bounded by great forest trees; there were dreamy paths winding in and out of old woods, through which might be heard the slumberous murmurs of a waterfall; picturesque ruins cast their shadows over a solitary belt of evergreens; and in the extreme distance the grey tower of an ancient church enhanced the quiet solemnity of the demesne. The place was wonderfully still. You could hear the branches crackling in the frosty air, and the low twitter of the birds that dropped in every now and then round and about the house, which was in the old baronial style, presenting an irregular outline of roofs, turrets, and chimneys, and broad masses of light and shade, that helped the imagination to a world of romantic suggestions. The scene was ill-chosen for the purpose contemplated by Mr. Rawlings. It is not in these pensive solitudes that the young bruised heart is likely

to seek or find oblivion. The brooding silence, the loneliness and repose, only throw it back to feed upon its memories ; and as the recent Christmases of which we are writing were not like the Christmases of old, buried in snow and sleet, and locked up in frost, but as mild and temperate as May, Margaret often contrived to escape into the woods, where she might uninterruptedly indulge her private reveries. The consequence was, that she thought a great deal more about Henry Winston than she might have done had she been allowed to continue her open intercourse with him. The effect of the separation was in reality to deepen and strengthen her attachment.

It is only justice to Lord Charles Eton to say that he soon discovered a certain reluctance in Margaret's manner which he had not anticipated, and that he acted towards her on all occasions with the most scrupulous delicacy. He carefully avoided trespassing upon her privacy, or pressing his attentions at unpropitious moments ; and if any gentleman, under such untoward circumstances, could have succeeded in making a tender, or even a grateful impression on a heart that belonged to somebody else, Lord Charles must have accomplished that by no means impossible achievement. He certainly succeeded so far as to make her think very favourably of his generosity and magnanimity—a sentiment of respect which, occupying the region of reason, lies at the antipodes of love ; but whether the course he pursued was dictated by the noble motives she ascribed to him, or by a judicious policy founded upon his knowledge of human nature, we will not undertake to determine.

Clara had frequently thought of hazarding a bold step, and upon her own responsibility telling the whole truth to Lord Charles, and appealing at once to his chivalry and his pride ; but day after day she was dissuaded from putting her desperate plan into execution by the gentlemanly consideration with which he treated her sister. If he had actually known the real state of her feelings (which we do not mean to say he did not), it would have been impossible for him to have acted with more kindness and indulgent reserve. Except by the gentleness of his voice, and that peculiar abstraction which makes a man look very subdued and poetical, as if he were sitting in the moonlight, nobody could have guessed that he was in love with Margaret ; and until he actually avowed himself in some more direct and declaratory form, she felt that it would compromise her sister to talk to him on such a subject. She waited for him to

begin, but, either by accident or design, he seemed determined never to give her the opportunity. This went on so long, and so many dangerous moments were got over in safety, that at last she began to flatter herself Lord Charles would wear out and relinquish his suit. But the expectation which was thus encouraged by his lordship's conduct, was daily shattered by the unchangeable aspect of Mr. Rawlings. As he sat at dinner, his eye was constantly fixed upon Margaret with a significance that admitted of no misunderstanding. At breakfast, or when they went out to ride, or in the drawing-room in the evening, that cold and menacing gaze ever and always haunted her. If a ray of hope chanced to find its way into her heart, a glance at her father banished it, and all was dark again. It was evident that, however Lord Charles might be disposed to temporise, Mr. Rawlings was resolved.

"My father will make me hate him," said Clara one day to Margaret, "for treating you with such harshness and tyranny. Never to speak one kind word to you, although he sees what you are suffering. Lord Charles is a thousand times more considerate—he is so quiet and gentlemanly. I often think that he suspects the real state of your feelings."

"I have sometimes fancied so, too," returned Margaret; "but his assiduities are so constant that I see no escape from them. I am afraid, Clara, papa is quite as harsh to you as he is to me."

"I can bear that," replied Clara, "without a murmur; but I never see him looking at you from under his eyelashes, and watching every motion, as if you had committed some crime, that I don't feel myself burning all over. I wish I were a man for your sake, Margaret."

Similar conversations took place every day; the mystery of Lord Charles's manner, which baffled their penetration, the unrelenting rigour of Mr. Rawlings, and dismal speculations on the future, supplying them with inexhaustible topics.

In the meanwhile the Christmas festivities were carried on at a magnificent rate; and the company assembled at Ravensdale entered into them in a spirit of high enjoyment, without the least suspicion of the domestic episode which filled more than one heart in that gay scene with care and anguish.

It now becomes necessary to turn from the chambers of Ravensdale to the servants' hall,—a violent transition for which we should consider ourselves bound to make an apology

to our genteel readers, if it were not indispensable to the unravelment of our narrative. As we find in the management of the most elegant establishments, that the luxury and high living maintained with such faultless taste on the surface, could not be kept up without the help of that servile machinery which performs its useful operations in the kitchen, the butler's pantry, the scullery, and the wine-cellar; so histories such as this, which record the ordinary transactions of life, must sometimes descend from the company in the drawing-room to humbler actors who, by odd accidents, occasionally influence from below the turn of events up-stairs.

The reader has probably forgotten the existence of Crikey Snaggs, who has made an insignificant figure on the Ladder, and cannot be supposed to be in any way concerned in the action of the family drama. If, therefore, we bring Crikey Snaggs once more upon the stage, conscious as we are of the obscure position he occupies in the *dramatis personæ*, the reader may be assured that we have good and sufficient reason for so doing.

We may at once confess that we have all along felt a private interest in Crikey Snaggs, from the first moment when he made his appearance chattering in the snow-storm at Mr. Peabody's door in Trafalgar-row to this particular juncture when we find him matured into manhood, and considerably improved in mental culture and personal appearance under the fostering protection of Mr. Rawlings. We may be excused for this confession on the plea that poor Crikey was an orphan, labouring under a discouraging bodily disability, and because, working against adverse circumstances, he was faithfully devoted to the interests of his benefactor, and had consequently succeeded in advancing himself to a respectable post in the household. The great passion of his life was to evince his gratitude to Mr. Rawlings, to whom he owed everything he possessed in the world. But this was not the only passion of which he was capable. Although not very felicitously shaped by nature for giving it house-room, he discovered that he had a heart like other men. He was led to this discovery by a series of experiments he had made from time to time upon the heart of a certain Caroline, who was lady's-maid to Margaret Rawlings. When he commenced these perilous operations, he had not the slightest notion of committing himself to any consequences beyond those of that illicit gallantry with which town experiences had latterly rendered him

familiar. He thought Caroline very pretty and very easy-natured; but he found her more fascinating and less pliable than he had expected. Men who trifle with women, believing themselves to be secure, often discover to their cost, sooner or later, that they are playing with edged tools. Crikey began in sport, and ended in earnest.

This short sojourn at Ravensdale brought out Crikey's heart in full flower. The country air had its usual effect upon him; for even individuals with as little refinement as poor Crikey are quite as susceptible, in their own way, to the influences of solitude as people of more cultivated tastes. And thus it was that, after indulging in many stolen interviews with the tantalizing Caroline, he surrendered himself up at last without any further struggle to the grave conviction that he was over head and ears in love.

It happened one evening in the dusk that Crikey was urging his suit, in the recesses of that shrubbery of evergreens which clasped the heap of ruins already mentioned as one of the picturesque objects in the demesne of Ravensdale. The spot seemed to have been made for lovers. It was completely shut in from view, and being tangled in the interior, and difficult of access, was seldom invaded by visitors. But although nobody could see into the shrubbery, in consequence of the density of the shade, those within could see out, and Crikey kept cautiously close enough to the walk which wound past his retreat to see any person who might chance to be approaching. They had not been concealed very long when the silence and repose of the evening were disturbed by a slight sound which resembled a tread upon the gravel walk outside. Crikey, notwithstanding that he had suffered himself to be tempted into such contraband proceedings, had a very proper sense of what was due to appearances, and being resolved not to be detected in a situation so open to misinterpretation, he set himself at once to ascertain who it was, and to take measures, according to circumstances, for his escape. Presently two voices were heard. But he could collect only broken words here and there.

"Return to town—then—all over——" said one.

"You must be patient—rely upon me," said the other.

"Impossible—cannot live—I despair——"

"I promise you——"

The voices came nearer, and were now exactly opposite to where Crikey stood. Parting the branches gently with his

hand, he saw two figures—a lady and a gentleman. Gazing intently upon them, and without turning his eyes from them, he beckoned Caroline to come to him.

“Look !” he whispered, “and be silent.”

Caroline peeped through the trees, and saw them. They were within two feet of her. What light was yet in the sky fell full upon them, and she distinctly recognised Margaret Rawlings and Henry Winston.

The dismissal of Henry Winston was known to the whole household ; and Crikey, who was in Mr. Rawlings’ confidence, knew more about it than any one else. Having clearly satisfied himself of their identity, he retreated back through the shrubbery, and making Caroline take one path, he made a circuit in another direction out upon the lawn, skirting it on the opposite side with rapid steps towards the house. As he reached the ascent to the terrace he looked back, and fancied he saw the outlines of two figures still standing in the deepening shadows of the wood.

CHAPTER IV.

SHORT, BUT VERY MUCH TO THE PURPOSE.

It is not to be denied that Henry Winston’s surreptitious proceedings in the grounds of Ravensdale are open to censure. But there is something to be said on the other side. Circumstances had thrown him into an embarrassing position at a time of life when the judgment is unripe, and passion has the ascendancy over reason. Having no occupation to give a fixed direction to his faculties, and having been brought up with an indulgence that pampered his desires and his will, it is not surprising that he should betray more impetuosity and headlong enthusiasm than older people may be disposed to approve. He had perfectly satisfied his conscientious scruples in reference to Mr. Rawlings by the frank declaration he made to him at parting. For the rest, he considered himself bound, by the most sacred obligations, to risk all consequences for Margaret. No calculations of present danger or future misery stood between him and the discharge of the duty which love and honour alike imposed upon him. Heads of families will condemn him, without benefit of clergy, for seeking private interviews with the young lady, in

direct contempt of her father's commands ; but the junior members thereof will think that he was not so much to blame.

The whole of that neighbourhood of Ravensdale, which enclosed the person of her he loved, was sacred ground to Henry Winston. Hurrying back from a dismal Christmas at home—the only dismal Christmas that happy family had ever passed, although none of them knew the reason why, except Rose,—he hastened into Norfolk, and loitered about the park at all hours, watching his opportunities, to communicate with Margaret. We are afraid that in these stolen meetings, despair, and jealousy, and a wild conflict of fierce and tender emotions, may have led him to urge upon Margaret the imperative necessity of an elopement ; but Margaret, so long as there was a hope of any other solution of their difficulties, pleaded for time and patience, and endeavoured to persuade him that Lord Charles Eton had no serious intention of persevering with his suit. They were arguing this very point at the moment when Crikey Snaggs discovered them together—Henry putting a widely different construction on the conduct of his rival, and using a hundred ingenious arguments to prove that the moment she returned to London her father would insist on her submission to his wishes. They separated, with an engagement to meet the next day, and argue over again a matter which they had already exhausted in every possible, and some impossible, points of view.

The next day came, and Henry, impatient of the “lazy-footed hours,” was at the trysting-place long before his time. But no Margaret arrived : her place was supplied by Clara. The bad news she brought was despatched in a few flurried words ; for she had a secret misgiving that there had been treachery somewhere ; and that Henry's presence in the neighbourhood was known to her father. This was only a surmise ; but it was founded on circumstances so sudden and unexpected, as to admit of no other explanation. The evening before, Mr. Rawlings had desired Margaret to get ready to go with him to London ; and he had taken his departure with her at an early hour that morning. Lord Charles was to follow the next day ; and within the week the whole party was to be broken up. This was all Clara knew ; but it was enough to inspire her with the most miserable apprehensions about her sister. She entreated Henry to act prudently ; it was clear that the business had taken a very serious turn ; and, arranging how he was to communicate with her when they

returned to town, she left him, with a promise that she would herself apprise him of everything that went forward.

It was perfectly true, as Clara suspected, that Mr. Rawlings had heard of Henry's visits to the woods of Ravensdale. He had learned that fact from Crikey Snaggs. But she little imagined that her own footsteps had been vigilantly watched from the house, and that the same faithful pair of eyes and ears which had witnessed the last interview of the lovers were, at that moment, employed in discharging the same function with reference to herself.

The plot was now thickening on both sides; and the *imbroglio* deepened as the Rawlings' family, breaking up their holiday festivities, resumed their residence in Park-lane.

It was impossible to gather anything from the impenetrable manner of Mr. Rawlings. He preserved towards Margaret the same coldness that had marked his intercourse with her all throughout; and Clara could plainly see that she, as well as her sister, had fallen under his suspicion and distrust. She was not very happily framed by nature for a conspirator; she was too open, and earnest, and sunny. But the fear of committing any step that might further endanger her sister's happiness, or precipitate a crisis, which they both looked forward to with dread, made her act with a circumspection against which her spirit perpetually revolted. In this way she contrived to keep up a secret and confidential correspondence with Henry Winston; and was the bearer of more than one treasonable communication between him and Margaret. All this was very wrong, but it was very sisterly, and forced upon her by the daily contemplation of that sorrowing face, whose smiles she would have gladly rekindled at the sacrifice of her life.

The suspense of the lovers was not destined to last very long. About a week or ten days after the return of the family to town, Mr. Rawlings was closeted a whole morning with Lord Charles. The nature of their conversation may be inferred from the sequel. That evening, Lord Charles, who had dined in Park-lane, taking an opportunity of placing himself, as usual, beside Margaret, formally, but with much tact, opened the subject about which he had hitherto observed so inexplicable a reserve. His tone was so soft, kind, and respectful, that she almost felt grateful to him; and when he came to an end, she was sufficiently collected to thank him for his good opinion, and to say that she must have time to

consider; but with a hesitation which showed how little he had to expect. He was too skilful a diplomatist to take so blank an answer; and he pressed her to give him some hope. Now Margaret was very timid and modest; but she was also very true-hearted; and possessed the latent courage which is always associated with truth. She felt how unjust it would be to sanction a hope she could not satisfy; and, even with the terror of her father's wrath impending over her, she resolved not to deceive Lord Charles on that point. She, therefore, told him frankly that it would be uncandid to desire him to hope, in the present state of her feelings; assuring him, at the same time, that she was not insensible to the honour he designed her. Had she obeyed the impulse of her heart at that moment, she would have been more explicit; but the terror of consequences restrained her.

In the course of the evening her father spoke a few words to her apart.

"Lord Charles has made his offer to you?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have accepted him?"

"I told him that I would consider of it."

"What have you to consider?"

"It is so serious a step, sir—surely a little time——"

"A mere subterfuge. You think you are deceiving me, but you are only deceiving yourself. I am not in a position to trifle with Lord Charles Eton—I have given him my consent, and I command you to give him yours. It must be settled within a week."

"A week!"

"You now have my final determination."

The forlorn hope which Margaret had clung to with such tenacity vanished in these terrible words. What was to be done? How was she to avoid the misery to which her father had peremptorily sentenced her? A week—only a week to think, to determine, to act! All that night long the sisters held counsel together, but could see no escape from the doom which now seemed inevitable. The only conclusion they arrived at was the necessity of communicating to Henry Winston what had occurred. Clara undertook this dangerous mission. She was afraid to trust the explanation to a letter, lest his hot temper might commit him to some act of frenzy, and a meeting was accordingly arranged at one of the great shops where the ladies were in the habit of making purchases.

Henry was prepared for the worst, and bore the intelligence with more fortitude than Clara expected. But she did not quite like the air of sternness with which he received it. All that wild and incoherent passion he had hitherto displayed seemed to have settled down into some dark determination. He asked her what Margaret intended to do?

"What can she do?" inquired Clara in return.

"It is life or death with me, Clara," replied Henry; "there are but a few days before us."

"What do you mean?"

"Let me see you to-morrow, here—or anywhere you please—and I will bring you a letter to deliver to her—it will contain my final request. Will you promise me?"

"I will—here—at one o'clock."

"Come alone."

"I will try."

This conference, which was held in a breathless undertone, was abruptly broken off by the appearance of Mrs. Rawlings, who had been left waiting at the door in the carriage. How far Mrs. Rawlings may have guessed what was going forward is open to conjecture. She had latterly shown unusual kindness to Margaret, and had talked very little to her about Lord Charles. Whatever her impressions or feelings may have been, it was evident that she considered it necessary to avoid implicating herself in the business, and that she was trying to hedge as well as she could between her sympathy for Margaret, and the implicit respect that was due to the wishes of Mr. Rawlings.

At one o'clock the next day, Clara took the risk of leaving the house alone and on foot, that she might have a better opportunity of hearing everything Henry Winston had to say.

He looked pale and haggard, and spoke in the nervous manner of a man who had wound himself up to stake all upon a single cast.

"Here is the letter, Clara, open. Read it, that I may know what you think of it, and what I am likely to expect."

Clara hastily ran over the words of the letter, the closing sentences of which were blistered with tears, and heavily scored to make them emphatic. After depicting his agonies, and declaring that he could not survive her marriage with Lord Charles, he urged her to fly from the misery that awaited her, appointing a certain morning at nine o'clock

when he would have a carriage in readiness at Stanhope-gate to carry the plan into execution.

This appeared to Clara a very desperate proposal; yet, although they discussed it for more than an hour together, she could not bring any stronger argument against it than its obvious impropriety. What was that to a lover who reiterated over and over again that he would not outlive Margaret's refusal, which would not only destroy him, but embitter her own happiness for life?

Clara was so open and transparent in her actions, that it is not improbable she looked very guilty when she was trying to do anything surreptitiously. She hid the letter in one of those mysterious recesses of her dress to which ladies sometimes confide their manuscript secrets; and when she got home, flew up stairs precipitately to avoid observation. Unluckily, her flurried manner was noted by one who had good reason to suspect the office in which she had been employed.

At the second landing were the doors of Mr. Rawlings' chamber and dressing-room, the latter of which was partially open, and appeared to move slightly as she approached. Trivial as the incident was, it increased her trepidation, and she attempted to creep stealthily to the third landing. Just as she reached the door it opened wide, and her father stood before her, blocking up the passage. Without uttering a word, he seized her by the arm, and drew her into the dressing-room, instantly locking the door on the inside. She comprehended the terrors of her situation at once. But her love for her sister was stronger than any fears she could have on her own account, and she resolved, let her father deal with her as he might, that she would never reveal the secret with which she had been entrusted.

When Mr. Rawlings had locked the door, he turned sternly to her. "So!" he exclaimed, "you have joined in a plot to bring your sister to ruin and disgrace. I desire you this moment to confess everything you know, or prepare yourself for consequences that will pursue you with remorse and misery to the grave."

Clara, willing enough to take all consequences upon herself, if she could only avert them from Margaret, declared that she alone was to blame; that her sister's confidence was more sacred to her than life itself, and she implored of him not to require her to betray it.

"You may do as you please about your confidences," said

Mr. Rawlings; "but you must answer to me strictly for your disobedience to my commands, in sanctioning private meetings between your sister and a person I had forbidden you both to hold any intercourse with; and not satisfied with that, you must carry letters between them. You see I am acquainted with your treachery, and no equivocation can screen you from my displeasure. But it may not yet be too late for you to make some atonement. I have reason to believe that at this moment you are conveying a letter from him to your sister—deliver it up to me instantly. I have the power to compel it, and it is useless to attempt any evasion."

The tone in which this was spoken showed Clara clearly that her father was not in a mood to listen to appeals or explanations. Her alarm at finding that he was already acquainted with her secret came too suddenly upon her to be concealed; she was sufficiently self-possessed, however, to feel, that upon her conduct at this juncture depended the fate of her sister. There was only one escape—to secrete or destroy the letter.

"I will not deny, sir, that I have seen Henry Winston. I have never told you an untruth."

"He gave you a letter for Margaret?"

She made no reply, but attempted hastily to draw the letter from her dress. Mr. Rawlings observed the action, and, anticipating her purpose, grasped her hand, in which he found the fatal epistle crushed up. The last struggle was over, and, giving herself up for lost, she sank into a chair.

Mr. Rawlings read the letter deliberately, and, standing opposite to her with a withering fierceness in his look that indicated some terrible resolution, he resumed.

"What punishment do you think you deserve for abetting this atrocious scheme to draw down wretchedness and infamy on your sister? You deserve my eternal malediction! I will spare you, on one condition—Swear to me, upon your knees, that you will never divulge the contents of this letter, or the conversation you had this day with the villain who wrote it, and that you will never hold any communication with him henceforth, directly or indirectly. Swear this to me on your knees, if you would not incur my curse."

"Oh! sir," cried Clara, falling on her knees before him, "that is a hard condition. I will try to conform to your will, but do not bind me to shut up my heart from my sister. If I were not to answer her when she questions me, where

could she turn for consolation? Trust to my discretion, sir, and I will not abuse your mercy."

"You refuse to submit to my commands? Then hear my resolution—from this hour you shall never see your sister again. I will separate you for ever."

"Oh! God!" shrieked Clara, "revoke these words."

"I have spoken them," said Mr. Rawlings, "and I will abide by them. Reflect, therefore, upon the consequences of your refusal. You have outraged the duty you owe to me and your mother, and you deserve that I should cast you out from the family you have done your best to disgrace. Swear to keep the conditions I impose upon you, or you shall never again be permitted to see or speak to your sister."

"Sister!" exclaimed Clara, in a wild agony of terror; "for your sake, I swear! You will understand all, and pity the wretched Clara."

Mr. Rawlings made her repeat the conditions, word for word, and, having bound her to them by a solemn oath, folded up the letter, and putting it into his pocket, opened the door and left the room. In a few minutes Mrs. Rawlings rushed up-stairs in a state of terrible consternation, and when she reached the dressing-room found Clara stretched insensible on the floor.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH THE ODDS ARE AGAINST THE FAVOURITE.

THERE was an interval of three clear days between the date of Henry Winston's letter to Margaret, and the morning proposed for the elopement. Throughout the whole of that interval, which seemed to him a century at least, he expected hourly to obtain some tidings from Clara; but he watched and waited in vain. In this tumultuous condition he fancied a hundred things, each new fancy driving out its predecessor as fast as his brains could fabricate one wild supposition after another. To say that he neither eat, nor drank, nor slept, nor sat still, nor performed any intelligible act for two consecutive minutes, would be a very inadequate way of conveying a notion of the bewildered state of his faculties. The fact was, he had utterly lost his balance, and, considering the desperate thoughts that at times took possession of him, and the violent measures of relief he meditated from hour to hour, it was

wonderful that he carried himself safely up to the morning when, considerably before the appointed time, he made his appearance at Stanhope-gate in a travelling-carriage, looking frightfully pale and ghastly—for, having had no intelligence up to this hour from Margaret, he approached the crisis of his fate with the most dismal forebodings.

We are afraid we must not give him the full credit of having controlled himself by any philosophy of his own during that racking interval. The merit was chiefly due to the prudent counsels of Mr. Costigan, who, seeing the forlorn condition to which the young man was reduced, volunteered the friendly office of keeping guard over him up to the last moment. From the instant Mr. Costigan had discovered his secret, he never lost sight of him; and, although he was not exactly the sort of person Henry Winston would have selected for a confidant, yet that unhappy young gentleman found much comfort in his company. The consolations of genuine sympathy are above all price. The mere babble of a heavy grief is ease to the wounded heart; and to do Mr. Costigan justice, the patience with which he listened to Henry's incoherent talk, and the rough, strengthening advice he administered to him, were not without a soothing and salutary effect.

Mr. Costigan was in his element in a business of this nature, and had had so large an experience in similar affairs, that he considerably mitigated Henry Winston's grief, and fortified him for the ordeal that lay before him, by the narratives he related to him of the clandestine marriages, elopements, and duels he had assisted at in the course of his meteoric career. It was surprising, indeed, that he did not recommend his *protégé* to send a message to Lord Charles; but he wisely deprecated such a proceeding, not because he did not cordially approve of that mode of adjudication, but because, under existing circumstances, it would have placed his young friend in a false position, seeing that no direct *casus belli* had as yet arisen between him and his lordship. Mr. Costigan was a great stickler for certain rules to be observed on these occasions, which might all be summed up in two golden maxims,—the first of which was to put his opponent in the wrong, and the second to keep him there. Could he have only got a hitch of any kind upon Lord Charles, he would have had him out the next morning. As it was, he thought the most advisable course was to run away with Margaret, and, if necessary, to shoot his lordship afterwards.

Henry Winston occupied a lodging in Duke-street, St. James's, a couple of dingy little rooms, that might be said to be folded up into each other, on the second floor. Some college friend had recommended him to the house, which was a regular lodging-house—that is to say, an establishment rented off in apartments to single gentlemen, who let themselves out upon town all day, and let themselves in at night with latch-keys. This arrangement was a great convenience to Mrs. Stubbs, the respectable landlady, as it left her free to make a daily survey of the apartments, partly for the purpose of seeing that they were properly aired and attended to in the absence of their inmates, but chiefly as it enabled her to look after their little stocks of bachelor comforts, in the way of tea, brandy, and the like, which these heedless young men are so apt to neglect. Mrs. Stubbs took stock every day, and the necessity for this exercise of her motherly care was shown in the fact that, notwithstanding her vigilant inspection of the caddies and cupboards of her lodgers, their contents diminished from day to day with alarming rapidity.

Mrs. Stubbs was a widow. Her husband had been a box-keeper at one of the theatres, and many were the stories she used to relate of his extensive acquaintance amongst the aristocracy, and the fine annual benefits he made, and the jocose sayings of the lords, and even of the ladies, with whom he was intimate in his professional capacity, mixed with green-room anecdotes and traditions of that palmy time of the stage when Mrs. Mountain was in her glory, and the Siddons ruled over the realms of tragedy. During Stubbs' lifetime she lived in clover, and was able to enjoy the luxury of a chaise; but since the death of that popular favourite she was thrown upon her own resources, which consisted of whatever profit she could make of the house in Duke-street. There was little to be made of a lodging-house in the mere matter of rent, taking all vicissitudes into consideration; and Mrs. Stubbs' principal dependency was upon the general department of "extras," in the management of which she displayed remarkable tact and activity. She had acquired from the lamented Stubbs an insight into the art of popularity, which she turned to practical account amongst the waifs and strays who took up their occasional residence in her house, and who, being proverbially unskilled in the grocery concerns of human life, were peculiarly susceptible of the class of attentions she bestowed upon them. She was, indeed, all manner of women to all manner

of men ; knew everybody's history, as far as she could glean it from visitors, servants, or the originals themselves ; felt the deepest interest in the remote and unknown family connexions of her lodgers, and always had questions to ask after the health of relatives in the country, whose very existence was a problem to her ; thus showing an amiable sympathy in their affairs, without betraying any invidious distinction between the first floor and the attics, but treating all alike with a proportionate measure of solicitude ; and thus it was that she glided without difficulty into their financial disbursements, which, to her credit be it recorded, she considerably regulated according to the paying capabilities of the individual.

Now Mrs. Stubbs felt more than ordinary anxiety about Henry Winston. She saw from the beginning of her acquaintance with him the generous and unguarded points of his character, and how much he stood in want of such household services as she could render him. He did not seem to have a great deal of money to throw away, but she discovered that what little he had he threw away with a thoughtlessness which called aloud for the controlling hand of such a friend as herself. Nor was she long at a loss to penetrate the secret of his abstraction and heedlessness ; but there was little merit in her divination on this subject, for it did not require the acumen of so good a judge of young men's foibles to find that Henry Winston was steeped over head and ears in love. Having clearly satisfied herself as to that fact, her next object was to ascertain who the lady was, and this she hoped to extract from Mr. Costigan.

If Mr. Costigan had a weakness, it was whisky. That was the duct that ran direct to his heart. When he came of an evening, Mrs. Stubbs was always assiduous in seeing that there was a sufficient supply of alcohol for his use, and he was nothing loth to help her in contributing to swell that item in Henry Winston's bill of charges. But he had too magnificent a sense of the confidence involved in affairs of honour to let a clue to the mystery with which he was entrusted escape him. As he thought it a pity, however, to disappoint her altogether, considering how liberal she was of his friend's "materials ;" and being of opinion, moreover, that it was desirable to baffle any inquiries that might be made at the lodgings after Henry Winston had got clear off with Margaret, it occurred to him that it would be a stroke of sound policy to throw out a few misleading hints that would put inquisitive

people on a wrong scent, and at the same time appease Mrs. Stubbs' curiosity just as well as if he told her the exact facts of the case.

The evening before the appointed morning that was to make Henry Winston the happiest or the most miserable of men, Mr. Costigan was at his post in Duke-street, having been employed throughout the day in endeavouring to pick up some information in Park-lane, without being able to obtain the slightest intelligence, the ladies being shut up in their own rooms and denied to everybody. Henry Winston, who had buoyed himself to the last in the hope that before the day was out he should have some tidings from Margaret, gave way to a burst of despair upon learning the result of Costigan's mission; but Costigan, whose hopefulness generally ascended in proportion as circumstances looked more gloomy, drew the most cheerful omens from his failure. Wasn't it natural, he observed, that Margaret should refuse to see any one at a moment when she was making preparations to leave her home, and throw herself into the arms of her lover? What did he, Winston, think she shut herself up in her room for? Why, she was packing, to be sure! And much more to the same effect. Henry thought there was some reason in these arguments—but then why did not Clara contrive to send some communication to him? He looked out of the window constantly for the postman, still thinking that a note would come to relieve him; and it was not till long after the last delivery was over, and the tramp of footsteps in the street began to give warning of the approach of night, that he relinquished that lingering hope. Sometimes he thought that Margaret must have been offended with him for proposing such a step; and thus, racked by a thousand doubts and hopes, Henry Winston went through the most miserable evening he had ever passed in his life. He thought morning would never come.

All through these heavy hours, while Henry was pacing up and down the room, or stretching himself fiercely on a sofa, Mr. Costigan was luxuriating in an arm-chair, replenishing his tumbler from time to time, and trying to divert Henry's thoughts by sundry wild jokes and wilder remonstrances.

"'Pon my honour and conscience," said Mr. Costigan, "I'm ashamed of you. Pooh!—the back of my hand to you—I disown you entirely. Why, man, if any one was to take a perspective view of you now, growlin' and tossin' yourself about,

they'd be mighty apt to think that, instead of goin' to be married, you were goin' to be hanged. Ah! then may be you are—but it's round an alabaster neck, you reprobate! Whoo! I wish I was in your place. By my honour, it isn't tearing my hair I'd be, but sittin' down quietly, and settlin' the particulars about to-morrow. I dare say, you've lost the memorandum I gave you?"

"No—I have it here."

"Well, just give us a rehearsal of it, to see if you remember what you're goin' to do."

"Oh! I have it by heart—post to Southampton—I know every spot where I am to change—arrive an hour before the start of the boat—cross to Jersey—then over to St. Malo. I know it all—but it's not that—it's not that."

"Then I wonder what it is if it isn't that? You'll be whistlin' another tune this time to-morrow mornin', when I'll be throwin' an ould slipper after you, and singin' out,—

The Lord be with you! and a bottle of moss,
And if you never come back it'll be no great loss!

Listen to me now. Ould Mother Stubbs is comin' up with the hot water; and as they'll be sure to be makin' tender inquiries after you when you're gone, we must put her on a false scent. Just go into the next room for a minute, and let me open the business to her; and mind, whatever I say, you must swear to—or hold your tongue, may be that'll be better in the charmin' mood you're in. Here she is—be off with you."

Henry Winston went into the bedroom as Mrs. Stubbs made her appearance with a jug of boiling water, from the mouth of which the steam was issuing in voluminous clouds.

"More power to you, Mrs. Stubbs," exclaimed Costigan, brightening; "you're the woman for keepin' us in hot water; a practice, I believe, that's pretty universal amongst the sex in general, and small blame to them for that same."

"Ah! Mr. Costigan," returned Mrs. Stubbs, "you Irish gentlemen are always so pleasant—poor Stubbs was very fond of the Irish, and so am I. I'm sure I've every reason to speak well of them, although I'm afraid you're a set of gay deceivers—you are! *That* water boiled, Mr. Costigan, if ever water boiled in this world. Where's Mr. Winston?" she added, in a lower tone.

"There," said Costigan, pointing to the inner room—"packin' He's off to-morrow!"

"I'm grieved to think it," cried the landlady; "I'll never

see such a gentleman as him in my house again—he was so easily pleased, and so goodnatured and condescending. Well—I hope it's to better himself he's going."

"Hard to say, Mrs. Stubbs. I don't much like it myself; but then, I'm a little too ould to emigrate?"

"Emigrate, Mr. Costigan? You don't mean to say that Mr. Winston is going to emigrate?"

"If you were to take a trip down to Liverpool to-morrow mornin'," continued Costigan, raising his voice, "you'd see him takin' his departure on an agricultural expedition to the backwoods of America."

"Well, of all places," cried Mrs. Stubbs, "that's the last I should have thought a gentleman like Mr. Winston would bury himself in. I'm quite shocked to hear it—I am indeed."

"Don't be shocked, Mrs. Stubbs. It's a tearin' speculation for a young man, and you mustn't put him out of heart with it. But mind what I tell you—be careful what you say about it; because, you see, some of his friends want him to settle at home, only he has particular reasons of his own for going to America; and I dare say the Rawlingses may be askin' affectionately after him—though, to be sure, once he's gone he's gone, and it's no great matter what any one says or thinks, after that."

"I'm sure I'd do anything in the world to oblige Mr. Winston; and if anybody should ask——"

"Well, I wouldn't have you deceive them. What's the use of deceiving them? Just tell them that he took a short stick in his hand, and went to seek his fortune. Drink his health, Mrs. Stubbs, and may the devil blow the roof off the house he's not welcome in!"

Mrs. Stubbs, taking up the glass that Costigan filled out for her, went to the door of the bedroom, and, dropping a curtsey, pronounced her benediction upon the young man, who felt rather ashamed of the hoax in which he was a silent accomplice.

"Thank you—thank you, Mrs. Stubbs—but I'm very busy just now. I shall see you in the morning before I start."

Mrs. Stubbs was very uncomfortable at this intelligence. She suspected there was something more in it than Mr. Costigan thought proper to tell her, and she went away, privately making up her mind to watch every stir on the following morning, and ascertain whether Henry Winston was really going to Liverpool. Her own opinion was that he was going

to fight a duel, and she had some serious thoughts of giving a hint to the police. At all events, she would be on the alert. But Mr. Mick Costigan was too experienced a tactician to be out-manœuvred even by the wide-awake Mrs. Stubbs, and had already taken measures to secure his friend against the risk of being traced or followed.

The night wore on in much low and earnest talk about the business of the next day. Costigan gave Henry Winston some subtle advice how he should act on the road, and what he ought to do in the event of being pursued, or of meeting any person likely to recognise him. The contemplation of these possible dangers, and the necessity of providing against them beforehand, threw a colour of seriousness into the conversation which abated for the time the throbbing anxieties of the lover. The affair began to look real at last. The consummation or the wreck of his hopes was close at hand. Only a few hours now intervened till his fate should be known and accomplished. And all this talk about what he was going to do, and how it was to be done, gave it an air so practical and seductive, that his imagination was easily ensnared by the prospect of a happy issue to his troubles.

Mr. Costigan having wrapped himself up in all the coats he could find in the room, and taken possession of the sofa, with the card-cloth for a counterpane, Henry Winston went to bed. But, under such circumstances, it is easier to go to bed than to go to sleep, and he lay very restlessly for a long time, turning from side to side, counting the quarters as they struck in the turret of St. James's Church, and listening, with a sort of infatuation, to the nasal trombone which was performing a singularly irregular obligato movement in the next room.

Margaret's face, sometimes looking very sad, and sometimes lighted up with gaiety, as it used to be in the happy hours of their childhood, flitted incessantly before him; and all the words she had spoken at different times came crowding back upon him, jumbled and confused; and he thought of many things that had happened, and went over old scenes, which he set in new frames, and animated with new actions and imaginary dialogues, more passionate and eloquent a hundred-fold than any he had ever uttered in her actual presence; and these memories, tricked out with fanciful devices, steeped his senses in a chaos of speculations, under the influence of which his eyelids dropped, and, between waking and sleeping, with the

half-consciousness which attends the slumber of love when it is fretted to the core by fears and misgivings, he fell into a dream of her who was the arbiter, for good or evil, of his whole life to come.

It was a dream, not of the past, but of the future. Lovers are always deluding themselves—even in their sleep! His head was so full of the morrow, that he started at once, full gallop, from Stanhope-gate into the regions of phantasy. Margaret was at her appointment, timid and frightened, and folded up in veils and shawls,—then, swifter than light, they were together, flying over roads and down green labyrinths, and away to the roaring waters, with many a tremulous touch of remorse, and backward look of fear; then all was accomplished, and they were beyond the seas, and there was a sunny lake, clasped round by soft hills, green to the peaks with foliage, and the still sweet air dropped odours around them, as they gazed into the abysses of each other's eyes, and felt that tender and serene happiness which but once, and then for too brief a space, absorbs and melts our hearts in this world of stone and ashes. For a moment they stood on the margin of the lake as motionless as the shadows of the trees that lay aslant the transparent sunshine, and then Margaret's lips parted, and a voice rose upon Henry's ear—

"Holloa! man, you'll sleep your seven senses away. It's half-past seven, and you'd never forgive yourself if you were late!"

Henry started from his sleep, and, opening his eyes, saw the ungainly figure of Mr. Costigan leaning over him, and two brawny hands firmly placed upon his shoulders, in the act of shaking him with might and main. The ecstatic dream was over—the reality was before him in an instant. The process of the toilette was rapidly despatched—he had little time for reflection, and went through the form of breakfast more like a man who was still dreaming, than a lover on the *qui vive* for the most critical of all adventures in which a lover could be engaged.

During breakfast Mr. Costigan had the discretion to trouble him with few observations, and the burden of them was to hurry and "not to keep the creature waiting."

The room was in as great a litter as Henry Winston's faculties. He had wound himself up for one object, and neglected and forgotten everything else.

"Will you see to these things?" he said to Costigan; "I

have thought of nothing. Where's the travelling-case? Hadn't I better send for a cab?"

"For Mrs. Stubbs to take the number, and track you like a hound? Now, isn't that a sensible idea of yours? My dear boy, you've put yourself in my hands, and it's the etiquette to act under my orders. Don't trouble yourself about the things. You'll find them at the railway-station at Southampton, directed to Thomas Joyce, Esq.,—mind the name—you have it in the paper. You must walk out with the case under your arm—I'll take care you're not followed—and when you turn the corner, cross over, duck under a horse's head, pretend to take one cab, jump into another, and away with you as fast as the garron can pelt for the bare life to Prince's-street, drop out there, and run for your life to the livery-stable, where the carriage is waiting for you, and off to the woman that owns you, and may bad fortune and ould Rawlings be a day's march behind you for the rest of your life!"

Uncouthly as this speech rang upon his ears, Henry was affected by the pains his wild friend had taken to provide for all contingencies, and his eyes said as much as he silently squeezed his hand.

"Are you ready now?" demanded Costigan. "One partin' word before you go. You don't know much of the world, and your head isn't exactly just at present as clear as it ought to be. Keep yourself cool—don't touch sperits! I'm an ould fellow, and love, maybe, is all over with me; but I've known what love was in my day, and feel for you, my poor boy! My blessing go with you! Send for me if you want me, and it'll be a mighty big act of parliament that'll stop me from comin' to you. But mind what I tell you—keep your head cool—don't drink! A man flies to it in trouble; but drink only maddens the sorrow, and makes us as helpless as children. I know it well. Many and many's the time—no matter now. Who cares for Mick Costigan, or b'lieves that such an ould, half-cracked sinner has a heart in his body? Ah! my darlin' boy, we've all hearts, if we dare give way to them! Now, here's a little partin' gift for you to take with you—it's a charm against bad weather!—just whip 'em under your arm, and away with you!" handing him at the same time a small mahogany case, covered up in green cloth.

"What is it?" inquired Henry Winston.

Costigan quietly opened the case, and displayed a pair of neat hair-trigger pistols, which had evidently seen considerable

service. "They're ould travellers," he said, "and if they could spake, they'd tell you some quare stories. There now, not one word, but go. You'll be late, I tell you."

Henry Winston wished to say something, but Costigan hurried him out of the room, and would not even let him stop to say "Good-bye!" to Mrs. Stubbs, who, although she was watching his departure, was not in time to catch him, as Costigan pushed through the hall, and, rapidly closing the street-door after him, placed his back against it just as Mrs. Stubbs emerged from the parlour. Mrs. Stubbs was thrown into a great taking at this disappointment, and wanted to run out into the street to shake hands with her lodger at parting, but Costigan carried her back into the parlour very much against her will, and kept her there till his friend had ample time to effect his escape.

In the meanwhile Henry Winston acted strictly upon Costigan's strategic hints; and, taking a cab in Piccadilly, arrived in a few minutes at the livery-stable, where he found the travelling-carriage in readiness to take him to his destination. At half-past eight o'clock he reached Stanhope-gate.

The morning was chill and dreary. A thick damp fog hung over the houses. Few people were astir, and, with his blinds carefully drawn down (which betrayed his inexperience in such affairs), Henry Winston watched, with a kind of morbid interest the life that was awakening in the opposite houses, typified by the opening here and there of the curtains of the upper windows, and the occasional vision of a head peering through the glass at the dull clouds that hung over head. He noted every face that passed by, and some of them turned to look at the carriage, which had rather a suspicious appearance in such a place at such an hour; and as the numbers gradually increased, curiosity increased in proportion, and even the policeman stopped, and seemed to examine the carriage with those peculiarly inquisitorial eyes to which a man who is employed in any secret transaction is apt to attach a very disagreeable meaning. Every bonnet that came in sight was anxiously scrutinized, and once or twice, in the eagerness of his treacherous expectation, Henry Winston jumped out of the carriage to run after some figure that he fancied bore a vague resemblance to Margaret, only to return depressed and disappointed.

Nine o'clock, half-past nine, and ten o'clock came and went, and the moving population was growing, and carriages were

thickening in the road, and the flags were alive with foot-passengers. The individual scrutiny became more and more difficult. His terror now was lest he might miss her in the crowds that passed up and down, or lest, not seeing him at once, she might get frightened and go back again. While he was undergoing a martyrdom from these racking fears, an open carriage, which instantly attracted notice from the splendour of its appointments, approached at a leisurely pace the spot where he had taken up his position. At the first glance he fancied he knew the liveries; and we hope it will be no disparagement to his courage to say, that at that moment his heart fluttered as if it had wings and wanted to fly out. As the equipage drew nearer, all doubt upon the point vanished. It was Mr. Rawlings' carriage.

Henry Winston lifted up the corner of the blind to assure himself of the fact; and, as if that action had drawn the attention of the people in the carriage, the eyes of two of them were directed full upon him. The carriage passed within a few yards, and he could see them distinctly, although it was not so certain that they could recognise him, as he was seated in shadow. He could hardly trust the evidence of his senses at a sight which blasted all his hopes, and turned his love into horror and despair. There were three persons in the carriage, Mr. Rawlings and Margaret, and opposite to them—Lord Charles Eton. Mr. Rawlings and Margaret looked straight at the blind which he held trembling in his hand; and he was close enough to them to see that, as they drove slowly past, there was a smile—could it be of derision or triumph? for he interpreted it both ways—upon Margaret's face! He thrust his head wildly out of the window, but the carriage swept on, and in two or three minutes disappeared. Should he follow them, or remain where he was, and wait the issue? Perhaps, after all, Margaret was compelled to go out that morning, and would surely come to him as soon as she could escape; and, if he left the appointed place, he might lose her for ever. But then that smile, so sweet, so bitter, so indifferent, so heartless! Why did she smile? Was it to give him an assurance of her truth, or to show him how happy she was with his rival? And how did it happen that Lord Charles was with her at that early hour? And, above all, for what purpose did they drive in that direction, past the very spot where she knew he was waiting for her? It was all dark and inexplicable, and the fierce conflict of feelings which at once

bewildered and paralysed him, ended by fascinating him to the spot, where he yet hoped to see her again. It is hard to relinquish such a hope, and lovers in desperation will cling to the frailest chances, as drowning mariners are said to clutch at straws.

Hour after hour rolled away, and the busy traffic of the day lulled into evening—but Margaret Rawlings returned no more.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SISTERS.

PEOPLE who show an eagerness to condemn the conduct of others in situations in which they were never placed themselves, are apt to lay the flattering unction to their souls that they would have acted differently in similar circumstances. We are all wise, and judicious, and self-possessed *after the event*. And very virtuous are we who are out of the reach of temptation, and unscathed by the sore trials of the world. This is the virtue of the coward who, secure from danger, boasts of his courage; of the shrew, who, after an unlovely and unsolicited youth, casts her scorn upon the blight of poor beset and suffering beauty; of the rich man, to whom want is an allegory, and who, when he denounces the famishing wretch that has stolen a loaf, is quite confident that he would rather starve than do such a thing himself. Alas! for all our self-reliance, none of us know what we should do till we are tried.

If our virtues were to be measured by the loudness of our protests against the vices, what an angelic world it would be! But virtue is not the negation of evil, it is the practice of good; and the most practical, and saving, and sweetest of all the virtues, is charity!

We do not desire to apply this test rigorously to the opinions which, according to temperament and circumstances, will be pronounced upon the conduct of Clara and Margaret—we apply it only in such a minor degree as the nature of the case may justify. Most readers will, probably, find satisfactory reasons for objecting to the course pursued by our heroines. Many young ladies would have shown more firmness; if they had been Margaret, they would have refused Lord Charles point-blank, and abided the issue; or they would have done something else, instead of temporising so weakly and timidly:

and if they had been Clara, they would have died before they would have given up the letter, or be scared into an oath of secrecy. We must here beg leave to observe, that we have not undertaken to portray perfect women, still less women whom we can hope to reconcile to the varying theories of ladies who criticise such dilemmas at a safe and tranquil distance from their agitation. We admit that Clara and Margaret might have displayed more heroism ; although we are not so sure that every-day existence developes the heroic quality in sufficient abundance to warrant its adoption as a rule in such cases. Great faith, no doubt, may be placed in the prompt and sagacious instincts of women ; but exigencies arise when instincts are confused and beaten down, and when all that armoury of wit and skill, finesse, endurance, and high resolution, so potent on ordinary occasions, becomes useless and unavailable. Stern and obdurate strength is not the finest characteristic of women ; they are most strong and most loveable in their weakness. In this aspect we discern their humanity, which brings them nearer to our sympathies. Even their errors and failures add a grace to our devotion by leaving something for our magnanimity to forgive.

Margaret Rawlings was placed in a struggle between Duty and Feeling. None can judge rightly of the severity of that struggle except those who have passed through it themselves ; nor can their judgment be fair and just, unless, like her, they are of a tender and gentle nature, sensitive, truthful, and patient. The mass of mankind are more taken by rough and vigorous features of character than by such qualities as these. The picturesque brigand of the stage, with a few brave claptags tacked on to his spangles, hits the fancy of the audience with a much lustier effect than the white-handed lover whom he despoils of a trembling mistress. In spite of his illicit proceedings, they like him better for the sake of his boldness. But we can't all be brigands. Some amongst us must be made of more delicate materials, or how should this mixed drama of life get on ?

If Margaret hoped in time to harmonise the discordant elements by which she was surrounded, it was the inspiration, not of weakness or indecision, but of a deep conviction of the obligations imposed upon her on both sides. To reward her lover by the violation of her duty to her father, or to sacrifice her lover to her duty, appeared to her equally criminal ; and any more direct course than that which she took must have in-

evitably led to one or other of these results. She put her trust in her own truth, and kept the balance of her conflicting anxieties steady as long as she could.

In such a situation Clara might have exhibited more fire and energy; but she must have come to the same conclusion in the end, for she was governed by too strict a sense of what was due to parental authority to have actually outraged it. She would have dismissed Lord Charles *coûte qui coûte*, and stood upon her right to do it; but she would have gone no further; and if she couldn't have had the man she loved legitimately, she would have lived on in the pride of her heart, and died an old maid. As it was, she showed as much constancy and courage as circumstances demanded or permitted; and when at last, taken by surprise, overwhelmed with accusations which made the blood throb in her cheeks, and threatened with a vengeance which made her shudder, and which she knew that he who threatened it was too well capable of inflicting to its extremity, she sank under the trial—who shall say that, reduced to such a strait, crushed down by a malediction, having no time to think, no means of escape, no opportunity for destroying the evidence of a guilty complicity, they would have borne themselves erect through the ordeal?

From that hour a visible change passed over Clara's spirits. Her high temper had suffered a violent check; the sunshine of her gaiety was gone, and a heavy gloom had settled upon her life. Her lips were sealed against the sister she loved whose sufferings she no longer possessed the power of consoling; and the grief which preyed upon her was rendered almost intolerable by her own self-accusations and poignant remorse. In vain Margaret questioned her when they met about Henry Winston. Wild with terror, Clara clung to her and implored her not to ask what had happened.

"Spare me!" she cried, flinging herself at Margaret's feet and looking up at her with an expression of despair in her eyes; "you will break my heart if you speak to me about him. I can tell you nothing, Margaret—nothing, nothing. Believe in everything that is good, and true, and right—hope for the best—hope always, always! But spare me, my sister—do not ask me any questions!"

"Clara, my own true sister—I will believe anything everything, but that you would forsake me. Speak to me Clara—one word, one little word of comfort!"

"God of mercy! pity me, and show me some way to relieve this poor child of her great misery! Margaret—I will devote my whole life to you—it is the least my love for you can do. We shall be together to help and strengthen each other—that will be something—to me it will be all the happiness I can hope for in this world. There—be comforted—your own Clara will never forsake you."

"Dear Clara, be calm—be calm! What is all this terrible emotion! Will you not tell me what has happened? Henry—what is it? What has he done?"

"Nothing—nothing—he has done nothing."

"Have you seen him?"

"I cannot answer you. I implore you to spare me, and ask me no questions."

"O Clara! into what an abyss of wretchedness you plunge me. This suspense is worse than death. I would rather you would tell me the worst—I could bear anything better than this. Where is he? What does he say?"

"Margaret—I have nothing to tell you. Don't augur ill from that. If you knew all, Margaret,—if you could look into my heart at this moment—you would see what I am suffering, and have compassion upon me. Let us say no more about it now."

"Cruel—cruel!"

"It is not I that am cruel, my own Margaret. Oh! no—you do not believe that I would willingly inflict a pang upon you—I would suffer it myself a thousand times rather. You believe that—you know it—you know how tenderly I love you; and I only ask you now to confide in my love—it is not much, after all the proofs we have given each other——" she could not finish the sentence, her voice was choked, and she threw herself into Margaret's arms.

"My true-hearted, noble Clara, I will show you that I confide in you. I am silent. I will try to give you no more pain. I will pray for strength and patience. You shall see how patient I can be." And Margaret sobbed aloud as she pressed her sister to her heart.

Two days passed away, and the resolution was kept in words. But it was evident what direction their thoughts took, and how their harassed spirits hovered over the forbidden topic. Margaret tried to glean some information from her mother, and watched every look and action of Mr. Rawlings, in the hope of extracting a clue to the mystery; but

all in vain. The darkness in which she was involved only thickened round her.

On the second day Lord Charles Eton dined at Park-lane. There was a small party to meet him; and everybody at table apparently seemed to understand that his lordship and Margaret were engaged. This inference might be gathered from the tone in which they spoke to her, and the peculiar manner of Lord Charles, and especially from the pointed remarks of Mr. Rawlings, who obviously desired to make that impression upon his guests. The position in which she was thus placed for the first time, the inexplicable reserve of Clara, and the unaccountable conduct of Henry Winston, whose silence was now beginning to give her a new feeling of uneasiness, made Margaret strangely nervous. She began to feel herself deserted and unprotected. Then—and never until then—a sensation of pride, which always springs to a woman's rescue (sometimes before it is wanted), and never comes to the help of the other sex! took possession of her. Had Henry Winston faltered in his faith? This was a dangerous question—it came upon her suddenly and involuntarily, she did not seek it, and would have given worlds that it had never crossed her thoughts. Happy for her if it had not!

In the evening Lord Charles was unusually brilliant. His character in society generally was that of a man who shone in a *tête-à-tête*, or in a conversational group; but on this occasion he was universal in his lustre. He seemed to Margaret to have the air of a conqueror; and, worse than that, he wore his laurels so becomingly, with so much grace and ease, and was so thoroughly kind and gentlemanly, that, deeply as she resented the confession to her own heart, she could not help admitting that his bearing was faultless. But what had become of Henry Winston all this time? Why should he leave her in such a state of doubt and distraction? Why give such a triumph to his rival? A hundred similar inquiries found no answer but in the woman's pride, which resisted the first approach of a humiliating suspicion.

The conversation happened to turn upon a villa Lord Charles had been looking at in the Regent's Park, the style and decorations of which he described with the *gusto* of a connoisseur. Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings had been talking of it before, and had agreed to visit it together. Mr. Rawlings proposed that they should go the next morning, and, having many engagements through the day, he suggested the early

hour of nine o'clock, to which his lordship assented. Margaret took very little interest in the subject, although she was frequently appealed to for her opinion, and was not a little surprised when her father told her that it was his intention to take her with them.

"At nine o'clock, sir?"

"Nine o'clock!" exclaimed Clara, thrown off her guard, and turning deadly pale.

Mr. Rawlings looked sternly at Clara, who instantly left her seat and went to another part of the room.

If Margaret had been conscious of the design which this early excursion concealed, she would have risked the worst rather than have gone. But she had no suspicion of any purpose beyond that of driving her out with Lord Charles; and, having no reasonable excuse for refusing, she was forced to consent.

That night was to Clara a night of sleepless anguish. She saw that her father meditated something in reference to Henry Winston, and her head swam with the wildest conjectures. Nine o'clock was the hour appointed for the meeting at Stanhope-gate, and her father, acquainted with the rendezvous, was going to take Margaret out at that very hour with Lord Charles Eton. Did he contemplate any violence to Henry? She alone was the depository of the secret, and she alone could save him. But by what means? It was impossible to communicate with him in time, even if she were not bound to silence by a solemn obligation. But could she prevent Margaret from going? How to do it without awakening her suspicions, and reviving her fears in a worse form than ever? And while Clara was suffering all this torture, Margaret had fallen into a gentle sleep, which, for a few hours, was shedding its oblivion over her griefs.

When morning came, Clara tried to persuade Margaret that she had a headache—she was sure she had a headache. But Margaret was resolved to rally herself for Clara's sake, and by way of showing that she was keeping her promise to be patient, she declared that she had had a refreshing sleep, and was quite well. As a last resource, Clara said she would accompany her, but a glance from Mr. Rawlings put an end to that device; and so Margaret went without her, and left Clara behind more wretched than she was herself.

Mr. Rawlings' object was to show Henry Winston that his scheme was defeated, and to make Margaret an unconscious

agent in the mortification and contumely he desired to inflict upon him. The stratagem succeeded to perfection. As they swept past the travelling-carriage, which occupied a conspicuous position, drawn up at the kerb-stone, with its blinds down, Mr. Rawlings directed Margaret's attention to it with a dry pleasantry of manner that made her smile, either out of complaisance or indifference, little suspecting that that smile, which used to carry such joy to the heart of Henry Winston, now fell upon it like a bolt of ice!

Happy Clara, when Margaret returned safely home without a word of adventure to relate to her! But she asked no questions, and did not even know that Margaret had seen the carriage which had been prepared for her elopement.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH WE MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE UNEXPECTEDLY.

WE left Mr. Costigan shut up with Mrs. Stubbs in the little parlour in Duke-street, much to that good woman's vexation. Like the Irishman who captured three Spaniards in the Peninsular war, he fairly "surrounded" her; and when he got her into the parlour, he took care that she shouldn't get out again till it was too late to do any mischief; improving the opportunity by supplying her with exactly the kind of dark innuendos which suited his purpose, and which he knew she would lick into shape and retail to the utmost advantage. We should be doing injustice to Mrs. Stubbs if we omitted to add that she listened to him with profound attention, and showed as much interest in the affairs of Henry Winston as if he had been her own son, instead of a stranger and bird of passage, whom she never expected to see again.

Having completed this essential part of his morning's work, Mr. Costigan proceeded to the vacated chambers of his friend, and, collecting his disordered reliques, jumbled them together in a large trunk, which he covered with a linen case, the key being sealed up in a note inside, and, attaching a label to the top, directed, in a straggling, shaky hand, to "Thomas Joyce, Esq., Station, Southampton, to be kept till called for," he ordered a cab, and drove off to discharge the last act his warm zeal had undertaken. That duty concluded, he turned his face towards the city, and in ten minutes was bustling his

way through a dense crowd in front of Capel-court, where we must drop the curtain upon him for the present.

Mrs. Stubbs was tolerably fortunate, upon the average, with her lodgings. In the season she was generally pretty full; and out of the season she was seldom quite empty; so that upon the whole, to use her own modest phrase, she had no reason to complain. Upon this occasion her usual luck did not desert her. Few days had elapsed after the departure of Henry Winston, when a tall old gentleman, accompanied by a lumbering young man, attracted by the bill in the window, asked to look at the apartments. It was in the dusk of the evening, and Mrs. Stubbs was not able to satisfy herself accurately what manner of man the new comer was; but a candle speedily assisted her to a survey of his personal appearance, revealing one of the strangest figures she had ever set her eyes upon. The old man was considerably above the ordinary height, and very gaunt, with a great head and shoulders, and long arms and legs. His heavy, bony face, dark, and deeply indented about the mouth, with great bushy eyebrows, had rather a repulsive, or, at least, a startling expression, at the first glance; but this was probably owing to a huge pair of green spectacles, which straddled his nose so conspicuously as to suggest to Mrs. Stubbs an uncomfortable notion that he wore them for the purpose of disguise. His dress was equally remarkable, and no less equivocal—a loose coat with great pockets, a monstrous pair of trousers with a broad stripe down the sides, flapping over a prodigious pair of dirty boots, an old black handkerchief winding in a narrow stream round his neck, the whole apparel being much the worse for the wear. Yet, for all this uncouthness, his voice was soft, and his manner quiet almost to sadness, and, after five minutes' conversation, Mrs. Stubbs began to waver in her judgment. The stranger spoke broken English, and the worthy landlady took it for granted that he was a foreigner—a conjecture in which she was confirmed by the costume and aspect of the young man whom he called his *enfant*, and who, in much the same style of tailoring, was still more *outré* than the old gentleman.

Henry Winston's late apartments were duly inspected, Mrs. Stubbs keeping her eyes fixed all the time upon the strangers, out of a prudent regard for such little portable articles as happened to be within reach. This done, they all descended together to the parlour to discuss the question of terms.

"Your *appartement*, madame, is very well," said the old

gentleman ; "it is very good for me and *mon enfant*—we do not want much, madame——"

"Attendance, I suppose?" inquired Mrs. Stubbs.

"Attendance?"

"You breakfast at home?"

"Breakfast? oh! yes—certainly."

"We do not generally undertake to cook dinners; if a lodger is ill, or anything particular, I wouldn't object, of course, to a plain joint—but if you dined at home, you understand, it would make a difference."

"Yes, I understand—certainly, we dine at a *restaurant* always. What charge do you make, madame?"

"Well, the lowest farthing is thirty shillings a week."

"Thirty shilling! oh! *c'est trop cher!*"

"I don't know about that," returned Mrs. Stubbs, "but it is the cheapest lodging in London."

"Cheap? no—no—madame. I think it is very much. Thirty shilling for me and my *pauvre petit!*"

"What did you expect to get it for, sir?"

"*Eh! bien*—if I could see my friend, Mr. Rawling, I should not want money; but you understand, madame, I am not rich. I come to London to see my friend, my good friend, Mr. Rawling—can you tell me, madame, where I can see Mr. Rawling? he is my very good friend."

"Mr. Rawlings?" exclaimed Mrs. Stubbs, with an air of unaffected wonder, connecting this strange visitor in some confused way in her mind with the mystery that hung over her departed lodger. "Mr. Rawlings! Do you mean the great railway Rawlings?"

"Oh! yes—certainly—he is my good friend."

"No—sure! Mr. Rawlings your friend—then, perhaps, you know Mr. Henry Winston?"

"Winston? Winston? no—don't know Mr. Winston."

"Curious, and Mr. Rawlings so great a friend of yours."

"Ah! it is long time since I see Mr. Rawling, and Madame Rawling—ah! long time—I was a strong man then. I had my house and my *affaires*, and everything I want; but since then, madame, a great change has come at me. I am no more *agent*—*les Anglais* go, one upon the other. Yes, all gone, and leave me alone with *mon pauvre petit*—certainly, we are poor now; but if I could see my good friend, Mr. Rawling, he would do for me."

Mrs. Stubbs was slow to believe in the amiable side of hu-

manity—she had had too much experience the other way; but the simplicity and guilelessness of this poor gentleman were irresistible. His attachment to his “boy,” who sat looking on with a stupid face without uttering a word, somehow interested her, and, calculating upon opening a communication through his means with Mr. Rawlings, and, perhaps, establishing herself in the favour of that influential personage by revealing the information she had obtained from Costigan, she resolved to take her new acquaintance into the house upon the best terms she could get from him. A week or two, at all events, “couldn’t hurt,” she thought, and there was a chance of making a friend for life of the wealthy Mr. Rawlings.

In this complying view of the conditions, the treaty was soon agreed upon between the high contracting powers, and Mr. Sloake—for it was our friend, the agent of Tours, some twenty years older than when we saw him last—was regularly installed in his *appartement garni*.

Good Mr. Sloake was as innocent of the ways of London as a child. It was “as good as a play” to see how he was knocked about in the streets, with what an air of gawkish surprise he gazed at the windows, and with what timidity he would steal into an eating-house, and take off his hat to the bar-maid. Had he been in his teens, and come to London on a visit of juvenile curiosity, he could not have betrayed more apparent wonder and strangeness. But it was only his nerves that were affected in this way. The noises and the crush of human beings stunned him—the glare of lights, and the costliness of the shops, dazzled him: that was all. His thoughts were elsewhere, and that helped to make him the more absent and awkward, and to expose him to a multiplicity of accidents. Hard was the fate that compelled him to forsake the grave of his beloved Eugenie, where, after five-and-twenty years of widowhood, his heart lay buried. But what alternative was left to him? The English colony, upon whose patronage he had subsisted, had gradually thinned and dispersed, and, few as were his wants, he was at last reduced to the extremity of distress. He struggled as long as he could to keep the poor shed from which he used to look out of a morning upon the solemn cathedral that enclosed the ashes of his beloved; but he struggled in vain. It was a choice between the living and the dead—between the dead Eugenie and the precious charge she had bequeathed to him in that heavy boy who had grown up into

a sort of counterpart of himself, and who resembled him in everything but his quick affection, for Eugene was dull and unimpressionable, although quite as soft and tractable as his father. In this strait, being very ignorant of the world, and casting about on all sides for succour, poor Mr. Sloake bethought himself one morning of the generous Mr. Rawlings, who, many years before, had so munificently rewarded his humble services. Since that time Mr. Rawlings had become a millionaire—his reputation in the money-market was European—his name was connected with great loans and enterprises: would he remember the poor agent who had transacted a little business so much to his satisfaction? would he give him other commissions, perhaps put him in the way of setting up again? above all, with the power he possessed, would he provide for the *pauvre petit*, who had no expectations, no profession, hardly any brains, and not a friend upon earth? That was the grand object of his solicitude. If he could see Eugene settled, he would die content; but he could not die and leave his boy alone in this desolate world. He dwelt upon the project day and night, until at last it took such possession of him, always looking at it in a favourable light, as to produce what seemed at first a cruel resolution to tear himself from Tours, and make a journey to England. He was many weeks revolving this step in his mind, before he could summon up the requisite courage to carry it into effect. At length a day was settled on—a miserable, yet a hopeful day; and after a long night spent in prayers and tears over the grave of Eugenie, he turned to take his departure, and saw the last of the clumped roofs of Tours through the haze of a drizzling morning as he drifted down the waters of the Loire.

Mrs. Stubbs made a rapid acquaintance with his character. It was as transparent as glass. She had a great talent for making use of people—a talent which more enlarged minds look upon with much contempt, but which is singularly valuable to persons of a mean disposition. Now Mr. Sloake was the perfect pattern of a man to be made any use of she pleased. He never suspected anybody or anything—he believed everything he heard—he would do anything he was asked—he would tell anything he knew—in short, to employ a homely significant saying, you might turn him round your finger with the greatest ease in the world. Mrs. Stubbs, accordingly, did turn him round her finger; although it happened that she gained nothing by her dexterity in the end.

After making him wonderfully comfortable upstairs, and absolutely drawing tears into his eyes by her good-natured attentions, she invited him down to tea one evening, for the ostensible purpose of telling him everything she knew about Mr. Rawlings, and instructing him how and where he could obtain the much-desired interview with that gentleman. Mr. Sloake's ancient gallantry and tenderness revived under the influence of her kindness, and so, as the evening drew on, his heart opened wider and wider, and nothing would satisfy its yearnings short of relating to her, in turn, his own history, which he minutely detailed from his childhood to the very moment in which he spake. Their intimacy mellowed and ripened fast in the interchange of these genial confidences, and Mrs. Stubbs watched her opportunity to begin her revelations about Henry Winston, interesting his sympathies (which were always easily interested) in the first instance, and then proceeding from one particular to another, until she literally crammed him with all she knew about the young man, and a great deal more which she threw in by way of embellishment.

Mr. Sloake's feelings were painfully absorbed in this sad story—he pitied the youth sincerely—thought of his own son—offered up many a thanksgiving to Heaven that had spared him such an affliction—and undertook to recount the whole affair to good Madame Rawlings, with such panegyrics upon the goodness of Mrs. Stubbs, as, in the sincerity of his heart, he believed she deserved. He thought Mrs. Stubbs one of the best women in the world.

The next morning was decided upon for the visit to Park-lane, and a long consultation was held as to whether Mr. Sloake should take Eugene with him. He was strongly in favour of that measure himself, from a private conviction that the moment Mr. Rawlings should see the boy (now far advanced on the way to thirty), he would take such a fancy to him, that the fortune of the *pauvre petit* would be made for life. But Mrs. Stubbs opposed that course of proceeding. She didn't tell him exactly the reason why; she merely indicated that Mr. Rawlings was very much engaged, and that it would be only proper to defer to his convenience, and let him appoint his own time for seeing the dear boy. Mr. Sloake's innate modesty and self-depreciation acquiesced at once in this view of the affair, which gave him an exalted opinion of Mrs. Stubbs' prudence and delicate consideration for others.

At ten o'clock in the morning Mr. Sloake set forth on his

expedition, with his heart full to overflowing. He was confident of a kind reception from the benevolent Mr. Rawlings, and, as he couldn't endure the thought of keeping Eugene in suspense as to the result of his interview, and was, moreover, very unwilling to leave the poor boy at home by himself, he took him all the way to Park-lane, where it was arranged that Eugene should wait outside till his father returned to communicate the happy tidings which were to bring their weary pilgrimage to a joyful termination. Eugene accordingly ensconced himself under the shadow of a wall, while Mr. Sloake ascended the steps to knock at the hall-door, not forgetting, at the same time, to make a triumphant gesture to his son. It was as much as to say, "Courage! *mon enfant*. All our troubles are at an end at last!"

The door was opened by a grand livery servant, who stared rather impertinently at the visitor. Mr. Rawlings had all sorts of people calling upon him, but our lacquey had never seen such a person as Mr. Sloake before. It was Mr. Sloake's misfortune to be helplessly ignorant of etiquette, especially in the matter of costume; and this morning, being greatly agitated by the prospect that lay before him, he was more careless than usual at his toilette, and, perhaps, never looked so negligent and slattern in all his life. It is the luck of these good, unworldly people to blunder away their opportunities.

"Is Mr. Rawling at home?" quietly inquired Mr. Sloake.

"I can't say," returned the gentleman in powder; "what is your business?"

"Ah, sir!" replied Mr. Sloake, "my business? I want to speak to my very good friend, Mr. Rawling."

"Well, you'd better leave your message, and call some other time. He can't be seen now."

"Not now, sir? But I have come a long way to see him. It is not good for me to leave my message. I want to speak to him—I have a great many things to say to him. Message?—no—no. I must speak to himself."

"I tell you it's impossible this morning. What's your name?"

"Mr. Sloake is my name. If you tell him I come from Tours, he will come and embrace me. Ah! my friend, if you knew what is at my heart, you would feel for me."

"Stuff! if you don't choose to leave your business, you must go without, that's all. It's no use, I tell you,—he's not to be interrupted, and I must shut the door."

‘No, sir,—you will not shut the door upon my face. No—
—you shall not;—where is Madame Rawling? She will
never forget her uncle at Tours.’

“Her uncle?”

“Yes, sir,—her uncle. Ah! you have an uncle yourself.
importe—Madame will be very much *enragée* with you if
you shut the door upon my face, ha! ha!”

The lacquey, hardly knowing what to make of this appeal,
and secretly impressed with rather a supercilious contempt on
the score of birth for the family in which he was serving,
thought the best thing he could do was to announce this
strange visitor to his mistress. He accordingly admitted Mr.
Sloake into the hall, and went up-stairs, with an insolent grin
in the corners of his mouth, to tell Mrs. Rawlings that her
uncle from Tours wanted to see her. The high-bred town
nephew chuckled over the humiliation which he expected the
turning up of such a beggarly relative would inflict upon the
rich *parvenue*.

Mrs. Rawlings was in the drawing-room with her daughters.
The announcement of her uncle from Tours produced a
different effect from that which the footman had anticipated.
It was received with a smile of good-humoured incredulity.

“You must have made a mistake, William,” said the lady;
“I have no uncle at Tours. Didn’t the gentleman give his
name?”

“Yes, ma’am,—he says his name is Sloake.”

“Sloake? Sloake? What sort of person is he?”

“Well, ma’am, I can’t say. I think myself he’s a
foreigner.”

“Sloake? Oh! I have a glimmering of him now. Bless
me! it can’t surely be the same! Why, girls, this poor man
—Sloake? Sloake?—to be sure, that was his name;—well,
well, how very odd,—why it’s upwards of twenty years,—
what can he possibly want with me? Oh! I’ll see the poor
man, by all means. Show him up.”

And Mr. Sloake was shown up accordingly. The grandeur
of the apartment dashed him a little; and his shyness was
somewhat increased by discovering three fine ladies in the
room, not one of whom bore the slightest resemblance to the
plain, homely Mrs. Rawlings he remembered at Tours,
swathed in Scotch shawls, and carrying all manner of bundles
on her lap in the diligence. But Mrs. Rawlings remembered
him at once. There was no forgetting the loose coat and

great flapping trousers ; and there was hardly any change in the mahogany hue of a face that seemed calculated to last as long as the hide of a tanner. His hair was not a whit thinner or greyer ; and the only perceptible change that had taken place in him was an increased stoop he had contracted in his shoulders. In everything else he was the identical Mr. Sloake she recollected slouching along the streets of Tours.

Mrs. Rawlings motioned him to a chair, put him at his ease at once, by telling him that she remembered him quite well, and melted his heart by asking in the same breath after his son. Poor Mr. Sloake was at home in a moment, and ran into a long gabble about his affairs, and the object of his visit to England ; in all of which Mrs. Rawlings expressed much concern, assuring him that she was confident Mr. Rawlings would do anything in his power to serve him, qualifying that assurance, however, by an observation which had now habitually found its way into all such promises, that Mr. Rawlings was absolutely overwhelmed with applications.

Mr. Sloake had spoken first of that which was uppermost in his mind, but he did not forget good Mrs. Stubbs, and bringing round the subject to his lodging in Duke-street, he opened with an eulogium on his landlady.

“ Ah ! that Madame Stubb—she feel for me—she make me comfortable—she is a good woman, that Madame Stubb—she love my poor Eugene—she feel for everybody.”

“ Indeed—never heard of her.”

“ *Mon Dieu !* You never heard of Madame Stubb ! She live at Duke-street. Ah ! madame, she was very kind to a friend of yours. You would never do too much for her if you knew what she do for Mr. Henry Winston,—she cry for him—she love him—it makes nothing for him now,—but Madame Stubb could tell you such a story of him. Ah ! *mon Dieu !* it is a wicked world !”

“ Henry Winston ?” exclaimed Margaret ; “ do you know him, sir ?”

“ No, mademoiselle ; but I live in his *appartement*.”

“ I don’t understand,” said Margaret ; “ will you ask him, mamma, about Henry Winston,” she added, in a whisper.

“ We know Mr. Winston very well,” observed Mrs. Rawlings ; “ I suppose you lodge in the same house where he lives ?”

“ Yes, madame—what I mean, no. I live in his *appartement*,—he ’s gone—he will never return.”

"Gone!" cried Clara, fixing her eyes upon Mr. Sloake. Margaret turned to her sister, as if she thought that Clara had the power to clear up the mystery.

"What does he mean, Clara?" she inquired.

"I know nothing of it," said Clara—"gone? Did you say, sir, that Henry Winston was gone? You mean he has left his lodgings?"

"Oh! yes, mademoiselle; certainly—*pauvre garçon*—my heart bleed to tell you."

Margaret looked alternately at her mother and Clara. She imagined that they knew more than they wished her to hear. But she could collect nothing from the expression of their faces; and when Mrs. Rawlings begged of Mr. Sloake to explain, she saw, from the eagerness of her manner, and from the earnest way in which Clara bent forward to listen, that the intelligence was as strange to them as it was to her. Mr. Sloake went on with his story.

"*Pauvre garçon!* he was long time all wrong—would walk up and down, and in and out, and talk to himself; he lose his head, and good Madame Stubb watch him like a mother. It was love, madame, that make for him a great *bouleversement*. Ah! that love, madame—I could feel for him, when I pray at the grave of my Eugenie. Never, no more shall I see my Eugenie—but I see her in heaven!"

"Go on, Mr. Sloake—go on," said Mrs. Rawlings. Margaret held her breath; there was a struggle at her heart of doubt and pride that sustained her through this lingering explanation.

"*Eh! bien*—he go away. His friend want him to stay here—no, he must go. He cannot stay in England, and he emigrate all the way over the sea to America."

"Emigrate to America, Mr. Sloake; surely there must be some mistake," cried Mrs. Rawlings.

"No, madame, it is very true. Madame Stubb think—she don't know exactly—she think the poor boy fight a duel one morning, when he go out with pistols."

"Oh, this is wild!" exclaimed Clara; "whom should he fight a duel with?"

"Ah! that is the grand secret, mademoiselle. I don't know—Madame Stubb knew that he love somebody, and that he take her off to America."

"She knows this?" demanded Clara.

"Certainly. Very good woman, Madame Stubb. She

feel for him—she feel for my Eugene. She love Mr. Henry Winston, and want to stop him. *Trop tard! trop tard!* He will ship off at Liverpool, and Madame Stubb look in the journal every day for news of the young lady; but no, no news. She never heard no more of him since.”

“Margaret,” said Clara, drawing her sister away to the window, “do not believe this foolish old man. It is false, first and last. Henry Winston! oh, no—do not believe it.”

“Answer me one question, Clara. I have stifled my heart rather than give you pain by telling you what I am enduring. Did you ever hear of this before, or of anything to lead you to suppose that there is any ground for it?”

“Never—and I do not credit one word of it.”

“Then why have I never heard from him? What is the meaning of his silence? What has become of him? What am I to think? What *can* I think, but that some change has taken place which, whatever it is, must separate us for ever?”

“To that, Margaret, I can say nothing. *If* he has changed, you should have better proof of it than such idle gossip as this.”

“I have proof of it, Clara, in his silence. But I will wait—I will be patient. For *his* sake I could have suffered much without repining; but if I have cause to believe, as I do, that he is not the Henry Winston I once believed him, I will not break my heart.” As she spoke she drew up proudly, but the tears stood and glistened in her eyes. Clara was terribly shaken. She could not help feeling that Henry Winston ought to have taken some means of communicating with her or Margaret. She expected that he would have contrived to convey a message at least to her; and although she could not have delivered it to Margaret, it would have enabled her to speak more confidently about him. But his long silence, for upwards of a fortnight had now elapsed since she had seen him, deprived her of that last resource, and left her incapable of finding any satisfactory answer to the searching questions and womanly doubts of her sister.

While this little episode was taking place in the window, the conversation was still running on between Mr. Sloake and Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Sloake was dwelling upon the virtues of Mrs. Stubbs, and all she had done for Henry Winston, when Margaret, resuming her place, quietly asked whether any members of Mr. Winston’s family had been in town to inquire after him.

"No, mademoiselle. Mrs. Stubbs expected somebody to come—but nobody asked for him."

"That is strange!" said Margaret.

"Don't you think," observed Mrs. Rawlings, "I had better write to Mrs. Winston? This is a most dreadful business."

"No, mamma," returned Margaret; "why should we interfere? This gentleman, perhaps, may learn something more, and let us know."

"I shall do everything I can for you," replied Mr. Sloake; "and I hope I may see my very good friend, Mr. Rawling. It is twenty—two—one year since I saw him. Very good for him all that time, very bad for me. But now I see him, the sun shall shine for me again and *mon pauvre petit*."

Excellent, trusting, hopeful Mr. Sloake! the species to which you belong is growing very rare in England, and when we are fortunate enough to catch a specimen, we ought to make much of it. The thriving breeds of the Chippendales and Rawlingses will survive as long as there is a cinder left of the earth; and from our heart of hearts we hope they will not devour up all the Sloakes, but leave a few scattered over the surface, exemplifying to the end that innocent faith which finds it so hard to preserve its purity in this troublesome world of ours.

With many awkward bows, and lively protestations of gratitude, Mr. Sloake made his *adieux*, and sallied out into the street in search of his son. The ingenious youth was still crouching under the wall faithful to the spot where his father had deposited him. When they met, the old man could hardly restrain himself from embracing him in the fulness of his joy.

"Ah, my child!" he exclaimed, putting his hands affectionately on his shoulders, "this is a blessed day for us. We shall never know grief nor poverty no more!"

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH DIMLY SHADOWS FORTH THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

SEVERAL weeks passed away, and nothing was heard of Henry Winston. Worthy, quiet, persevering Mr. Sloake visited Park-lane regularly every day to communicate this important fact. Sometimes he saw Mrs. Rawlings, sometimes Margaret and Clara, sometimes nobody except the grand livery servant,

with whom he always left a mysterious message, to the effect that there was "no news," which much perplexed that individual, who set every artifice to work to find out what it meant. But Mr. Sloake was too clever for him, and not to be entrapped by the confidential whisper he would drop into his ear, and the encouraging tone of voice with which he would hold him in conversation on the door-step. All this time Mr. Sloake was unfortunate enough to call just at the wrong moment to find Mr. Rawlings, who was either down at the House, or in the city, or so engaged that he couldn't be seen; and, day after day, as he returned home with the same story to Mrs. Stubbs, that good lady's manner, at first so brisk and cordial, became gradually overcast and somewhat irritable. Mr. Sloake ascribed this to the interest she took in his welfare, and felt even more for the disappointment which he was sure she suffered on his account than he did for himself.

One morning there *was* a scrap of news—very slight, very tantalising, and leading to nothing; but Mr. Sloake was full of importance at having something to tell, and hastened to relate it to Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Costigan had called in Duke-street to inquire after Henry Winston. Mrs. Stubbs thought this very odd. What could he expect to hear from her of Henry Winston, especially if that young gentleman had really gone to America? He could hardly have arrived there yet. She detected also a certain incoherence in Mr. Costigan's facts that increased her suspicions. He said he had been every day looking out for a letter, and, supposing it might be addressed to her house, he requested her, if it should come, to send it to him immediately, to Gormley's Hotel, in Cecil-street, Strand. She thought it very strange that he should be looking out for a letter from a person who had only just set sail for America, and to satisfy her doubts, she went in the dusk of the evening to the hotel, where she learned, to her inexpressible astonishment, that letters were received there for Mr. Costigan, but that that gentleman was at present in Ireland. Putting these contradictory and very suspicious circumstances together in a shape eminently calculated to excite curiosity, she sent off Mr. Sloake the next morning to lay the case before Mrs. Rawlings. Mr. Sloake, for the life of him, could not help putting the best construction on the affair; but, in spite of his mild and palliating way of telling the story, he left Mrs. Rawlings involved in greater darkness and wonder than before.

As we are unwilling that any stigma should attach to Mr. Costigan on account of the evasive answer Mrs. Stubbs received at the hotel, we think it due to that gentleman to explain why it was given out that he was in Ireland, while he was actually marauding about the streets of London. The truth was, he was beginning to feel rather uneasy about the railways. About this time the first symptoms of a panic were breaking out in the busy hives of Moorgate; the committees were issuing premonitory letters to their allottees; and Mr. Costigan considering, like many other noble gentlemen who flourished in that era of our history, that discretion was the better part of valour, thought it prudent to make himself "scarce," and to mystify all inquirers as to his whereabouts. There was nothing very remarkable in this proceeding after all, so far as Costigan was concerned; for nobody ever knew where he lived. He had always received his letters at Gormley's Hotel; with only the slight difference on this occasion that, instead of getting them "the moment he came in," they were to be "forwarded" to him in Ireland—although he got them, for all that, as regularly and promptly as ever.

It is the easiest of all easy things to break the link by which two human hearts are united. The most trivial circumstance has been known to snap it, after it has stood the heaviest shocks. Hearts the most capable of devotion, are the most sensitive to wounds from those they love. There are men who will freely forgive an injury, but who never forget an insult; and there are women who will pardon the worst wrongs, but who are alienated for ever by a slight.

A terrible change was passing over the heart of Margaret Rawlings; but a stranger could never have guessed the misery that was consuming her life. She was absolutely gayer than usual—the effort to control herself forced her out of her ordinary quietude. She tried even to deceive Clara into the belief that she was not unhappy, and when they talked together about Henry Winston, she would laugh, turn it off, and speak of it as a foolish fancy, and say that she had grown wiser, and would think no more of him! Think no more of him! She would have given worlds to have been able to think of him as she had done only a few weeks before.

The mystery of his disappearance—the obduracy or heartlessness of his silence—while they racked her with bitter pangs, fortified her also with strong excuses for endeavouring to forget him. Whatever had happened he ought to have

apprised her of his movements. But instead of showing an impatience to relieve her from the suspense which he must have known she was suffering, he treated her with a callous indifference, that first ruffled her pride, and then insensibly made her doubt his love. This impression deepened as week after week rolled by without bringing her a particle of intelligence.

At last there came a letter, at the end of five or six weeks, from Rose. With trembling and eager hands the seal was broken. How her heart throbbed as she ran over the well-known handwriting! The mystery was now about to be cleared up, and all the old love gushed back in a flood upon her. No! she never doubted him—he was still the same—it was only his impetuous spirit that had broken him down—he had been ill all this time—very ill, and more wretched than she was herself—and for that instant of time she loved him—yes! she loved him as fondly as ever.

But it was only for an instant. She had not read three lines of the letter when a chill fell upon her. Could it be Rose Winston who wrote thus coldly and formally to her? She could scarcely believe it, and twenty times turned the letter over to look at the signature, to assure herself of the truth. The whole substance of the letter was simply to announce her approaching marriage, in fulfilment of a promise she had given Margaret; and the communication was made with the most freezing courtesy, as if the writer was performing a task very much against her inclination. There was not a single allusion to the subsisting agreement between them, that Margaret was to be her bridesmaid, and Henry's name was not even mentioned from first to last.

When Margaret read this letter, which she did half-a-dozen times over, for it was very short, she felt as if she were doomed to have her affections blighted on all sides, and as if the beings she loved best in the world were all turning from her and deserting her. And Rose—to whom she had so trustingly confided her secret—that Rose should write to her thus! Who should she ever love again? Whose love should she ever believe in again?

Her spirit was bruised; and it needed all the arguments Clara could think of to make her feel that she ought to answer this letter in the same tone in which it was written. And such an answer was manufactured between them, and despatched by the post. It was the dissolution of Margaret's earliest and fondest associations. Sometimes she fancied that Rose Win-

ston would soften and relent, and write to her again, as she used to do, and explain away everything. But the correspondence dropped out; and the next tidings she heard of her was the announcement in the newspapers of her marriage with the Reverend Pearce Upton, who had just been presented to a living in Devonshire.

Clara saw that Margaret was sinking into a state of passive endurance; and "this" she constantly whispered to herself, "this is my work!" The thought that she was the cause of her sister's misery haunted her day and night. She took to herself the whole blame of everything that had happened; and this unreasonable self-accusation did not lack a sufficient supply of distressing little incidents to aggravate its bitterness. A feeling of estrangement had crept into the family; they met, and exchanged cold courtesies; harshness and reserve had set in and displaced the affectionate greetings and open confidences that used to give such zest, and freedom, and vivacity to their intercourse;—and poor Clara, with her shaken nerves and bleeding heart, yearning to disburden itself of its cruel secret, was borne down by that helpless remorse which upbraided her as the spring of all this unhappiness. Even the tranquillity into which Margaret had subsided—so calm on the surface, so troubled beneath—was a reproach to her. One word would unlock a load of wretchedness; yet, could she have spoken it, how unwise and dangerous it would be to utter that word, now that Margaret appeared to be reconciling herself to her fate. So they seldom spoke of Henry Winston; and at length a tacit understanding grew up between them that it was a subject to be avoided. In a little time his name was mentioned no more.

As for Margaret, the course of suffering through which she passed could have no other termination than a resolution to cast him from her memory. It was not merely that her pride was hurt, but that her opinion of the worthiness of her lover had undergone a revolution. When this change began to be wrought upon her in the first instance, her grief was intense; but as she accustomed herself to contemplate the character of him she loved in a new and despicable aspect, her grief imperceptibly softened, and something like scorn and resentment came to her relief. She endeavoured to persuade herself, notwithstanding many involuntary pangs, that she had succeeded in banishing him from her heart; but the dull ache she felt in that sensitive region too plainly reminded her that if Henry

was gone, he had left a sad and dreary void behind. Wrestling as she could with this total blight of her young hopes, she gradually sank into a condition of utter apathy. There was nothing in the world that either pleased or ruffled her. She moved through the routine of life with perfect indifference.

Mr. Rawlings showed in this conjuncture a profound knowledge of the nature he had to deal with ; nor, rigorous as he was, must we deny to him the merit of being actuated by some consideration for the feelings of his daughter. In consequence of the discovery he had made in the suppressed letter, he suffered the week he had stipulated for her decision to pass over without any further allusion to her union. He saw that it would be injudicious to press such a measure at a moment when the state of her feelings might produce a revulsion that would probably drive her to extremities. He allowed a little time to elapse before he considered it prudent to renew the topic ; and when it was renewed, instead of re-opening it himself, he made a crafty approach to his object through the agency of Mrs. Rawlings, who was commissioned to manage the matter in her own way. This was much more alarming than if he had taken it in his own hands, for the trepidation of that amiable wife and mother, placed as she was between the two parties, gave a colouring of fright to her expressions which considerably heightened the urgency of the appeal.

Urgent it undoubtedly was. Railway politics were beginning to look very gloomy ; and, although Mr. Rawlings had made a stupendous fortune, that lifted him above all apprehension about panics and bankruptcies, he was well aware that when the crash came, which he knew was coming, he would be exposed, from the conspicuous position he occupied, to assaults and criminations from all quarters. It was of the utmost importance, therefore, to hasten the marriage with Lord Charles before these public disclosures should burst upon him ; and he had already carried the preliminaries so far, in a conference with Lord William Eton, who gave him an interview very reluctantly, and only at the earnest entreaty of his nephew, as to arrange the amount of his daughter's fortune, including a liberal annuity, which was to be tied up and settled upon herself. There was nothing now wanted but the formal consent of the lady.

Margaret questioned her heart severely ; she put it to the most searching tests. But of what avail were the hours of solitude she devoted to this hopeless inquisition ? An abyss

was between her and Henry Winston—they were never to meet again, or, if they did, to meet not as strangers, but as two persons who had reason to recoil from each other. What had she to live for, to care for, to love? What pleasure was there in her life that she should nourish it selfishly, and resist a sacrifice that was to make others happy—others, whom she was bound to honour and obey? And if this sacrifice was to be made, the kindness and forbearance of Lord Charles Eton rendered it less harrowing than it might otherwise have been. The delicacy with which he had treated her all throughout deserved her gratitude, and his stainless character commanded her respect.

Love there was none. That was gone for ever. Her heart was empty, and gave forth a hollow answer to every question with which she probed it. For what purpose was she to hesitate any longer? Who was interested in her refusal? Who would suffer by her assent? Not one human being. Then there was the vindication of her slighted feelings—the assertion of a natural sentiment of outraged pride. She was woman enough to feel that—to be conscious of something like a slight thrill of revenge. But it had little weight in her final decision, for the idea had no sooner presented itself than she stifled it. She would not act upon that—she had loved Henry Winston too well, too deeply, to suffer such a thought to mingle with an act that was to divorce her from him for ever. The motive that decided her was her desolation. There was nothing left to cling to. All excuse or pretext for resistance was over. Why should she hesitate? Whichever way she turned, all was blank and lonely—this way at least would contribute to the happiness of others; and for herself—herself! Oh! loveless life, what was there in it to shed one gleam of joy upon her path?

On a bright morning in the pleasant month of June, a crowd was collected about the pillars and portico of St. George's Church, Hanover-square, and a train of fashionable equipages blocked up the street. A ceremony was going forward within, the nature of which was indicated by the white favours that streamed from the hats and button-holes of the livery-servants who lolled round the carriages, showing off their wit and finery to the admiration of the by-standers. Presently a movement took place amongst those who were nearest to the door, and the people pressed back to make a lane for the approaching company. The door opened—every

head was stretched forward—but it was only the beadle with a grand staff to clear the passage, an office which he discharged in a highly dignified manner. Then there was a low buzz and flutter outside, and those who could see into the church perceived that the ceremony was over, and that the bride and bridegroom were coming out at last. After a pause of a moment or two they appeared at the door—the steps of a carriage were instantly rattled down, and the lady, closely veiled, to the great mortification of the curious spectators, was led hastily forward, and handed in. The whole progress of this interesting sight occupied hardly a second; and while the multitude were yet endeavouring to obtain a glimpse of the happy couple, the carriage which contained them vanished down the street.

There was a grand *déjeûner* that day in Park-lane; and when the health of the bride and bridegroom had been duly proposed and drunk, and sundry speeches were delivered, in which superhuman happiness was liberally prophesied as their unbroken lot through life, Lord and Lady Charles Eton bade adieu to their friends, and took their departure at a spanking pace to spend the honeymoon at Datchley.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

A BOW LONG BENT AT LAST WAXETH WEAK.

CHAPTER I.

THE PANIC.

AT this critical point of our history we would fain have a word with the Reader, who at the conclusion of the last chapter probably flung down the book in a fit of indignation, declaring that all the interest was at an end the moment Margaret Rawlings married Lord Charles Eton. What could happen after that in which a novel-reader could be expected to feel any sympathy? The young lady was married, and made wretched for life, and there was an end of her. Romance is over, and vegetation begins, when people marry. Hence it is that the established and legitimate law of novels

is to reserve the matrimonial incidents for the consummation of the story. You may do anything else you please with your characters during the course of the plot—you may even let them run away with other people's wives—but you must not marry them till the last page. The clergyman in a novel may be regarded as the undertaker of the story, and when he makes his appearance, the play is played out, and nothing more remains to be said or done but to bury the dead.

We hold your opinions, O experienced Reader, in implicit respect. You ought to be a much better judge of novels than we are—you, for whose delectation they are written, and who have read so many; and we whose reading, in comparison with yours, is not to be mentioned. It is, therefore, with much humility, as you may believe, that we venture to enter our protest, respectfully but firmly, against the doctrine you have just laid down.

A novel is a picture of real life, and the test of its merit is the fidelity of the likeness. But the province of Art is not confined to the treatment of the materials—it also embraces the choice of them. Many works, admirable for the exhibition of executive power, have failed from infelicity of judgment in the selection of subjects. We cannot be expected to indicate the subjects best adapted to the purposes of a novel; it is enough to say that they are such only as are reconcilable with general experience. Exceptional cases may be true as facts, but they are false as truths.

Over the whole realm of human passions and social conventions Art levies contributions. Every incident enclosed within the table of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, is at her disposal. The whole life of man, beginning in the cradle, passing through the church, and ending in the grave, is tributary to her objects. Upon what principle of reason or taste, then, do you require that she should stop short in the middle? Why should the novelist be restricted to that portion of existence which elapses before people can be said to have begun the world?

No interest after marriage? No interest in married women? We will not argue the question upon examples, although we have Shakspeare and Fielding with us—the Desdemonas, Imogens, and Amelias we should all be sorry to lose; we are satisfied to rest upon the interest which most people after marriage may be rationally supposed to take in their own lives. If it be true that they feel no longer any charm in existence, or any necessity to exist—if emotion, hope, ambition, the

action and reaction of social influences be extinguished in them the moment they take the marriage vow—if their career be ended the instant they write their names in the register—if they acknowledge themselves to be then and there divested of their hearts and heads, and denuded of civil importance and moral weight, of course we must admit that they have no business to figure in a novel, and that the old system ought to be implicitly adhered to, of ending with a ring of bells, as they used to end the cheerful antique comedy (which, by the way, had as many married as unmarried lovers in it) with a dance. But as a considerable proportion of the ladies and gentlemen who constitute the population of the world, happen to have committed wedlock, and as, we suspect, they would be rather unwilling to agree with you, O Reader, that they are thereby disabled from taking a share in the acted charade of human life, we must maintain the legitimate right of Art to follow up the journey of character and passion on the great highway as far beyond the half-way house of matrimony as her behests may require. In this, no doubt, as in all other parts of her vocation, Art is responsible for her choice of topics; and all the more responsible for choosing to pursue her narrative into scenes which are not usually considered very productive of popular interest. She must have ample justification for departing from the ordinary usage; and if she ventures upon the hazardous step of marrying people in the middle of a book, she must be prepared to show that it is essential to the completeness of her design, and that the disappointing effect of the incident upon the nerves of youthful enthusiasts has an adequate compensation in the crowning purpose of the story.

Having put these considerations as succinctly before you as we could, objective Reader, and endeavoured to vindicate the privileges of Art on a point which, for reasons that you are as yet ignorant of, gives us more uneasiness than it can possibly give you, we will proceed forthwith to gather up the dropped threads of our narrative.

We left Mr. Costigan diving mysteriously into dark lanes and obscure alleys, in the dusk of the evenings, and carefully avoiding the principal thoroughfares. It was not without good reason he kept out of the way. Writs, and rumours of writs, were falling as thick as hail over the kingdom; and, from the hour the panic set in, every individual who had anything to do with railroads, and who happened at the same time to have anything to lose, was struck with consternation.

Mr. Costigan had nothing to lose but his liberty ; and he prized it accordingly.

The crash was as instantaneous as the collapse of a balloon, when, after ascending gaily into the clouds, to the admiration of gaping multitudes, it suddenly discovers a rent—the gas escapes, and the gaudy structure comes tumbling to the earth. It is of little consequence whether that fatal rent was made by a bolt launched from the hand of the Thunderer, in Printing-house-square, or by the inevitable action of other influences ; for certain it is, that the aforesaid balloon, being composed of remarkably flimsy materials, must have burst at last, under any circumstances ; but history will justly ascribe to the Thunderer the glory of having anticipated its fall, and brought it down, while it was yet riding at a prodigious altitude in apparent security.

Sir Peter Jinks had the satisfaction of seeing the results he had anticipated fulfilled to the letter. Very clearly, too, was confirmed to him what he had all along believed to be the source of the mischief. The mass of the speculators were ruined ; and a few crafty hands had amassed enormous wealth. The history and moral of the bubble were dissected under his eyes. While thousands of unlucky dupes were skulking in holes and corners, selling off whatever they could turn into money, throwing up their employments, and absconding from indefinite responsibilities, such men as Rawlings were quietly reposing on the profits of popular credulity and infatuation. In Sir Peter's estimation, Rawlings was the chief delinquent. To his boldness and subtlety he attributed the invention of a system of gigantic swindling in the share-market, by which the bulk of the public were grievously defrauded ; and he resolved to bring the whole subject under the consideration of the House of Commons. His final object was to make an example of Rawlings ; to drag him before a Parliamentary tribunal ; strip him of the fortune he had accumulated ; and hunt him back, branded and degraded, into the obscurity from which he sprang.

Sir Peter was a vindictively honest man. Not content with the observance of the strictest integrity in his own transactions, he held it to be a public duty to make a crusade against frauds of all kinds, especially when they took a commercial shape. His activity in this direction was notorious. It was wonderful how he ferreted out fraudulent joint-stock companies, and gangs of plausible rogues, who, under the disguise

of mercantile firms, spread a network of robbery over the face of the country. A most useful man was Sir Peter in his generation: although his utility was of a class that frequently brought him into much personal odium and hatred.

Mr. Rawlings met the menaced exposure, of which Sir Peter made no secret, with contemptuous indifference. Railways, in every stage of existence—from the scheme that was nipped in the bud, to the project that had already lodged its plans and collected its deposits—were falling in wrecks about him; while others, in full operation, whose shares had hitherto maintained a high premium, suddenly went down to an alarming discount; but Mr. Rawlings preserved unmoved the same oracular composure that had marked his conduct all throughout. No man could extract from him even an opinion upon what Mr. Trumbull called the “eternal smash;” and the only criticism he ever condescended upon was an ironical smile when people expressed their dismay at these occurrences. But the affair was not regarded with similar *nonchalance* by his son-in-law. It was the work of his life to build up an unspotted reputation for himself; and he was so sensitive to the approach of contumely, that he shrank with alarm from the remotest suspicion which threatened to compromise the credit of any person with whom he was connected. These punctilious notions had descended to him from his uncle, and were refined to the utmost excess by the young statesman, who looked to external proprieties and an unblemished fame as the safe guarantees of success in public life.

The young couple took up their town residence in Lord William Eton's great house in Portman-square. Two extensive suites of apartments were reserved for their use; Lord William, who could not conquer his repugnance to the new connexion, and who never could prevail upon himself to receive Margaret Rawlings as a second Grace Hunsdon, carefully abstaining from any interference in their domestic arrangements. He breakfasted in his own room, and spent the day in his club, and rarely dined with his nephew except upon special occasions; so that, although they lived in the same house, their intercourse fell off considerably after the marriage. Lord William still felt the same interest, however, in the career of his nephew, and, as became his high breeding, treated the lady with distinguished courtesy whenever they met.

Lord Charles was so constantly engaged that Margaret was left much alone. Solitude was by no means unwelcome to

her, and the only society she cared to indulge was that of her mother and sister, who hardly suffered a day to pass without seeing her either at her house or their own. At first, Lord Charles was very indulgent about these visits; but his manner underwent a marked change when the panic set in, and aspersions of dishonesty began to be cast upon Mr. Rawlings.

They were seated at breakfast one morning, just at the time when the newspapers were filled with disastrous intelligence about the railway crash, and reports of public meetings at which the great projector and millionaire was freely denounced by hosts of bubbled shareholders.

Lord Charles was reading the *Times*, and found matter in it which, every now and then, made him knit his eyebrows with an expression of strong indignation.

"When were you at Park-lane, Margaret?" he inquired.

"Yesterday," replied Margaret.

"Well—and when are you to see them again?"

"I promised to dine there to-day, Charles, as you said you would be engaged at the House."

His lordship folded back the paper with an angry motion of his hand. There was a pause of a few minutes.

"Do you know what your father intends to do in these disgraceful railway affairs?"

"Indeed, I know nothing about them. But I hope you do not think any disgrace attaches to him."

"Think? I think, Margaret, that when a man suffers degrading insinuations to go abroad, and takes no trouble to refute them, it will be difficult to persuade the world that he is as free from blame as his friends would wish to believe."

"His friends ought to believe nothing to his disadvantage. We, at least, Charles, are bound to vindicate him against such calumnies."

"You are wrong, Margaret. It is he who owes that obligation to us. If he is indifferent to character on his own account, he ought to treat public opinion with respect for our sakes. But I am afraid his notions on the subject are rather lax."

"Lord Charles!" exclaimed Margaret, colouring deeply, and drawing herself up reproachfully. There was a look of severity in his face she had never seen there before.

"I have no wish to wound your feelings," he observed, coldly; "you are ignorant of these things, of course, and it is natural you should try to find excuses for him; but considering, Lady Charles, the change in your position, I am surprised

you are not more eager to prevent an exposure which must seriously compromise me as a public man. I must say—and I say it reluctantly—that when I connected myself with your family I had no suspicion that your father had acquired his wealth by means which would not bear the strictest investigation.”

“And who asserts that he acquired it by any other means?” demanded Margaret.

“Well—I hope it may turn out so. But, day after day, opprobrious charges are heaped upon him in the newspapers, and he doesn’t take the slightest notice of them. If he persists in this course—which is tantamount to an admission of their truth—he will compel me to relieve my own reputation from the animadversions his conduct is calculated to draw upon me.”

“Your reputation, Lord Charles? How can it possibly affect your reputation?”

“Simply,” returned Lord Charles, in a tone of grave asperity, “that the world will say I received a large fortune with my wife which was not very creditably obtained. He may be indifferent to such accusations—I am not. My name descends to me unsullied, and no taint shall fall upon it that I can avert—be the cost or sacrifice what it may.”

The bitterness and *hauteur* with which these words were uttered—the reserved resolution that lurked behind them—and the pride of birth which now, for the first time, escaped from the lips of her husband, threw a new light upon his character and Margaret’s position. The delicacy and respect with which he had hitherto treated her, had effectually obliterated the distinction of rank, and made her feel perfectly at ease in the enjoyment of her new honours. The wide difference between the daughter of a man of obscure origin, who at that moment was suspected of dishonesty in his dealings, and the descendant of an ancient house, who shrank from the degradation of his plebeian alliance, was now painfully apparent to her. Of all men, she believed Lord Charles to be the most generous upon points of feeling, and the last to be actuated by personal considerations. His temper was so calm and equable, he was always so ready to consult her inclinations, and had shown so much regard for her family, that she had the greatest confidence in the justice and kindness of his nature. She believed him incapable of meanness or selfishness; she even looked up to him as a model of integrity and high-minded-

ness, so completely had he succeeded in impressing her before marriage with those qualities which were most likely to conciliate her good opinion. But that flattering ideal, to which she had trusted for whatever negative repose her married life might yield, vanished in this brief conversation. He was no longer the same Lord Charles—latent and repulsive elements of character had suddenly disclosed themselves—and the discovery shocked and humiliated her. She was prevented from making any reply to his last observations by a hasty tap at the door, which was almost instantly followed by the entrance of Lord William Eton. His appearance surprised them both, and the flurried manner in which he advanced and seated himself at the table, showed that some unusual circumstance had occasioned his visit. After a formal “Good morning,” he turned to his nephew.

“Have you had any communication from Sir Peter Jinks?”

“None.”

“That’s not very courteous, as I happen to know that he is going about telling all the rest of the world his intentions respecting your—father-in-law.”

“Mr. Rawlings? What intentions?”

“Why, it is the common talk of the clubs. He did me the favour to apprise me of it last night; and was polite enough to say that as it might touch a member of my family, he couldn’t think of proceeding in it without giving me a friendly hint beforehand. It is something new, Charles, in our family to be warned in this way of an impending disgrace.”

“Disgrace, my lord?”

“Yes, Charles, disgrace. It seems that Sir Peter, who takes charge of all public nuisances and delinquencies, has resolved to move for a committee in the House of Commons to inquire into the railway swindles, with a particular view to the career of Mr. Rawlings. The consequences, I suspect, will not be very agreeable to the feelings of honourable people who happen to be connected with him. I beg pardon, Lady Charles, for speaking so unreservedly about your father; but a gentleman who holds his own reputation in such contempt, cannot expect much consideration from others.”

“Yet others might show a little more consideration for me,” said Margaret; “he is my father, and you must allow me to say that I am convinced he will justify himself. When he does, I hope you will repair the wrong you have done him.”

"When he does, Lady Charles," returned his lordship, with a satirical smile, "depend upon it, I will make ample reparation; but until he does, I hope you will forgive me for continuing to think that he does not care a rush for my opinion or anybody else's. I am sorry to be obliged to say this to *you*, but the matter cannot be cushioned; and my nephew has a name to maintain, Lady Charles, for which he is responsible to his family and his country."

"Why not see my father at once on the subject?" demanded Margaret.

"That would appear to be the obvious course, certainly," observed Lord Charles, "but I am afraid it would be useless. Mr. Rawlings admits no man to his confidence."

"I am sure, Charles, you have no reason to say so. At all events, make the experiment; go frankly to him, and tell him exactly what you apprehend. It would be more just and honourable than to condemn him upon newspaper slanders. I am satisfied that he will justify himself." She uttered this somewhat proudly. Her spirit was wrung. She felt the disadvantage at which she was placed in the presence of her patrician uncle-in-law, who, on this occasion, exhibited an unusual air of conscious nobility. The tone of patronage and superiority with which he apologised to her for defaming her father, hurt her more than his words, and brought out into direct antagonism those conventional differences which a marriage without love or sympathy renders so salient and galling. A wide gulf seemed to open between her and her husband's family—she felt as if she didn't belong to them, as if she had no right to be there, standing between them and the assertion of their untarnished lineage; and the revulsion of feeling awakened the daughter rather than the wife in her heart. Little cause as she had to turn to her father with affection, he was more to her now than her husband. As she spoke, the door abruptly opened, and Mr. Rawlings came in.

"Ah! sir," exclaimed Margaret, "you are welcome. Charles, I said he would justify himself. He is here to do it. Speak to them, sir, openly, for my sake—for your own."

Lord William threw himself back sternly in his chair, and Lord Charles motioned Mr. Rawlings to be seated.

"What is it, child?" inquired Mr. Rawlings.

"There are charges—I don't know what—brought against you in the newspapers, and you do not notice them. Will

you explain to my husband the reason of your silence. His uneasiness is natural, dear father, and I know you will put his mind at rest."

"His lordship is very obliging," said Mr. Rawlings, "to take so much interest in my affairs. But we cannot talk about business before a lady, you know;" and, handing his daughter quietly to the door, Mr. Rawlings returned to the table, and took the seat Lord Charles had indicated to him. "May I ask, gentlemen, what is the explanation you wish to have from me?" he inquired.

"I should have hoped," replied Lord William, "that your own sense of what is due to my nephew, might have pointed out to you the propriety of anticipating that question."

"If I had consulted my own sense of what is due to your nephew, my lord," said Mr. Rawlings, "I shouldn't have taken the trouble to ask the question; for I really don't see how he is entitled to any explanation of matters that in no way concern him; but you see I am willing to hear what part of my life or conduct he thinks himself privileged to inquire into."

"You do not state the case quite fairly, Mr. Rawlings," said Lord Charles; "I have no right whatever to institute such an inquisition; but you must feel, that where grave insinuations to your discredit are circulated in clubs and newspapers, my connection with your family must make me anxious to have them refuted."

"Then you consider it necessary, because you are connected with my family, that I should hunt up the slanders of clubs and newspapers, and refute them in detail? Is that your notion?"

"Yes, sir," interposed Lord William, "that is precisely his notion; and it is a notion, as you call it, which every man with the feelings of a gentleman must approve."

"Don't you think," returned Mr. Rawlings, dryly, "it would be as well to drop your feelings out of the question, and look at matters of business as matters of business strictly?"

"That may answer on the Stock Exchange, Mr. Rawlings," observed Lord William; "but you should remember, that when you formed an alliance with a noble family, you came into a different atmosphere."

"I do remember it," said Mr. Rawlings; "and I also remember that the noble family were very eager to form an

alliance with me. Which side do you imagine is the gainer by the connexion?"

"I dare say, looking at it in your way as a 'matter of business,' you are of opinion my nephew is the gainer. I will not commit such an outrage on good taste as to discuss the point with you. The question, sir, in which we are concerned, is to know whether you are prepared to free yourself from imputations which, if they have a shadow of foundation in fact, can leave *us* no option as to the course we must pursue."

"You are at liberty, my lord, to pursue any course you think proper," replied Mr. Rawlings; "and it may be satisfactory to you to be informed, that it is my intention to do the same. I have had some intercourse with noble families, and, upon the whole, I am not prepared to admit that, with all their sensibility on the subject of honour, they are a whit more honourable than their neighbours."

"Do you presume to insinuate," demanded Lord William, who had hitherto found some difficulty in restraining his choler, "that any member of my family is obnoxious to the suspicion of dishonourable conduct?"

"I will answer that question, my lord, by another. Do you presume to insinuate that I have acted dishonourably?"

"I do not deal in insinuations," retorted his lordship; "I repeat openly the scandalous reports that are in everybody's mouth."

"Pray, is it out of tenderness to me you take such an extraordinary interest in my affairs?"

"The question is absurd," replied Lord William; "what are your affairs to me? You cannot suppose I should trouble myself about you or them, if my nephew had not married your daughter."

"Exactly so," returned Mr. Rawlings: "your anxiety proceeds from no consideration for me, but purely from motives affecting yourself and your family. Instead of affording me, as I had a right to expect, the advantage of your support, and showing the world that you discountenance these calumnies, you throw the whole weight of your influence into the other scale, to give them additional force and currency. This is what I have gained by my alliance with the very noble house of Westland."

"You must exempt me, Mr. Rawlings," said Lord Charles, "from this censure. I feel deeply the painful situation in which I am placed, but I have carefully avoided giving any opinion, one way or the other."

"That is," said Mr. Rawlings, "you feel your own situation deeply, and take credit to yourself for allowing your wife's father to be maligned, without giving any opinion, one way or the other? Do you believe that is the way to mend your situation, or to induce me to stir one step in the matter on your account? I am amazed, Lord Charles, that a man who is so keenly alive to his own interest, should act with such egregious folly."

"Pooh! pooh!" exclaimed Lord William, "come to the point."

"You have disappointed me, Lord Charles," continued Mr. Rawlings, taking no notice of Lord William's observation; "I thought you were a better politician. And now, my lord," turning to Lord William, "you wished to hear what I had to say. I beg you will listen to it. When your nephew proposed for my daughter, I was given to understand that you had no objection to the match, nor did I consent to it until it was first sanctioned by you."

"I never approved of the connexion," said Lord William.

"But you sanctioned it."

"Well—granted—I sanctioned it."

"You had no objection, on the part of your nephew, to receive with my daughter a sum of fifty thousand pounds, with a life interest in two thousand a year. When that little arrangement was in course of negotiation, I was not apprised of any scruples you had about my reputation; nor did you exhibit any particular curiosity to ascertain the sources from whence her fortune was derived."

"Why should I? I knew of nothing against your reputation then."

"And what do you know against it now? Can you pick out of the malicious rumours set afloat by a mob of disappointed speculators, who are turning round upon every man that happened to be more fortunate or sagacious than themselves, one definite charge? Not one. And upon these despicable innuendoes you assume the right of demanding explanations from me, and casting a stigma upon my name."

"Really, Mr. Rawlings," exclaimed Lord William, with a scornful smile, "I must protest against being accused of having a design upon your name. I was not aware that there was any special distinction attached to it."

"There is this distinction attached to it," replied Mr. Rawlings, "that it has brought men of your class in troops about me, courting my favours. Your nephew was amongst the fore-

most of them, when he was seeking to aggrandize himself by a marriage with my daughter, and now, at the first breath of slander, you are ready to repudiate the connexion."

"I never had any connexion with you, sir," cried Lord William, in a tone of vehemence, "and I promise you I never will. Let my nephew answer for himself."

"I will answer for both. Your nobility enriches itself at the cost of my industry, and then, having got all it wanted, takes the earliest opportunity of taunting me with its insolent superiority. But the triumph is mine. I began the world without a shoe to my foot. I was treated with scorn, beaten, and buffeted like a beast of burden. I resolved to take my revenge on the tyranny of the world—and I have done it. My daughter—the daughter of the shoeless beggar—is Lady Charles Eton, your lordship's niece by marriage. You cannot evade that fact—she is amongst your countesses and honourables, and will look down hereafter from your picture gallery as proudly as the best of them. I have known what it was to want a crust of bread—I have starved by the road-side, and slept in fields and outhouses—what am I now? Will it humiliate your lordship, if I remind you that my house can't contain the people of fashion that crowd about me? I dine and dance the aristocracy—there is no end to cringing and flattery—I am suffocated with incense—it is more oppressive than the drudgery I went through for a daily subsistence—and I have the pleasure of knowing that out of my substance your lordship's nephew is enabled to make that magnificent figure which your distinguished ancestors forgot to leave him the means of providing for. Tell me, then, which of us has the best right to set up an arrogant ascendancy over the other—you, who quarter yourselves on my fortune, or I, who stuff the cushions on which you stretch your dignity?"

As he spoke, his form seemed to dilate, his head was thrown back with an expression of almost malignant contempt, and the fire of concentrated passion flashed up through his features.

"You are an extraordinary man, Mr. Rawlings," exclaimed Lord William, drawing a long breath. "I suppose you must take what course you think best."

"It is my intention to do so, Lord William," returned Rawlings, rising and taking up his hat; "and you must excuse me if I decline admitting you into my counsel, having got on pretty well up to this time without your help. One word before I leave you. If you fancy I value your connexion, you

are mistaken. All the advantage it can ever be to me, I have gained already. I have paid a high price for it, but I don't repent my bargain. On your side, the case is widely different—it is for your benefit, not mine, that we should keep on good terms, and, although I have no great opinion of your discretion, I think you know your own interests too well not to see the necessity of changing your tone about these railway libels. You must discourage them. It won't answer the purpose for you to appear indifferent. Your policy is indignation. Surely you ought to be indignant for your own sakes," he added, in a sarcastic tone; "and if anybody wonders why I am not indignant, all you need say is, that I hold these slanders in too much contempt to be angry about them. I wish you good morning."

When he was gone, Lord William and Lord Charles turned a vacant and baffled look upon each other.

"A wonderful man!" ejaculated Lord William.

"Very!" echoed Lord Charles.

"I am afraid we shall get nothing by provoking him."

"I am afraid not."

"Better leave him to himself, and see how it will end."

"Much better," returned Lord Charles.

CHAPTER II.

THE KNIGHTS OF THE BENCH.

THERE was high excitement in the House, and in the lobbies and avenues leading to it, on the night when Sir Peter Jinks went down to move for his Committee of Inquiry. All the way up-stairs to Bellamy's, anxious groups might be seen busily discussing the words of the motion, and speculating upon its effects. As the members passed in and out, they were stopped and questioned, and held in conference by attorneys, engineers, shareholders, and directors, eager to forestal the debate, and to supply hints and arguments favourable to their own objects; and when Mr. Rawlings made his appearance, it was the signal for an universal rush. Everybody had something to ask, or something to communicate to him; the majority of the people present being as deeply involved in the business as he was himself. He met the torrent of voices with a placidity that justified their confidence in his courage. He had the strongly-knit frame, the solid head,

and calm, passionless, but handsome, face of a man of inflexible resolution. There was not a trace of emotion visible in his features, and the extreme quietude of his manner indicated a firmness and self-possession which few men could have exhibited under such circumstances.

The scene in the interior of the House was as tumultuous as on the outside. There was an unusually large attendance. The rage for shares had penetrated even that august body, and a considerable portion of the members were directly interested in the disclosures which it was understood Sir Peter was prepared to make. It was his speech, rather than his motion, that was looked forward to with apprehension. Nobody cared much about the motion; for what with the inevitable delays that wait upon the labours of committees, and the facilities for obstruction and procrastination presented by the machinery of Parliament, there could be no great difficulty in staving off the report, session after session, until curiosity and clamour should have expired. The debate was the thing to be avoided; and the debate was the main object upon which, in the first instance, Sir Peter hoped to attract public attention. His entry into the House with a huge bag of papers, consisting of prospectuses, letters of allotment, circulars, balance-sheets, plans, maps, bills of costs, multifarious accounts, and lists of committees comprising an appalling show of members of Parliament, was ominous of slaughter.

Mr. Rawlings took his usual seat, which happened to be in an angle a few benches removed from Sir Peter, a position which enabled the latter to command a full view of him, and to give pointed effect, with hand and gesture, to the personal allusions with which he freely garnished his oration.

Sir Peter was by no means a good debater: but he was famous at getting up a case. His diligence in the collection of small facts, the bitterness and causticity of his invectives, and the relentless perseverance with which he hunted down his victim, rendered him a formidable opponent on occasions like the present. From the whispers that had got abroad of the nature of the statement he intended to make, the general question had become gradually merged in the personal impeachment, and the whole interest of the scene was concentrated upon the accuser and the accused. The House watched the progress of the business with much the same sort of eagerness a Roman mob may be supposed to have felt when two gladiators leaped into the arena. A speech of two hours' length, con-

taining a bushel of "modern instances" to a penniworth of "wise saws," could not fail to tell. It possessed the charm which always attaches to fierce attacks upon character and the exposure of corruption. The whole system of railway jobbing was laid open from the beginning; the art of rigging was clearly expounded, and plentifully illustrated; the unauthorised use of influential names; the tricks and subterfuges of unprincipled attorneys; the frauds of boards in the sale of shares and appropriation of funds; and numerous secret acts of collusion and swindling of which the innocent public had little or no suspicion. At every count of the indictment Sir Peter was careful to mark out the chief offender, calling upon him at each step as he advanced to furnish explanations of sundry mysterious transactions concerning which no satisfactory account could be wrung from him by the suffering shareholders. If the existing law did not reach these nefarious cases, then a law, having a retrospective operation, should be specially enacted for the purpose. At all events, he (Sir Peter) was resolved that no effort of his should be wanted to bring the iniquity to light; and after drawing a picture, for which he was several times called to order, of a career of spoliation by which an obscure man had contrived to obtain unparalleled influence over credulous masses of people, infecting nearly the whole community with an insane belief in his infallible power of turning everything he touched into gold, Sir Peter concluded by moving for a sweeping inquiry under the auspices of a Select Committee.

There was a dead silence when he sat down. Everybody waited for the answer. At last, after a pause, Mr. Rawlings rose. As the House seemed to expect that he should say something, he rose, he said, in obedience to their wishes, but he really had nothing to say. The hon. gentleman had indulged in a number of rambling assertions, out of which it was impossible to select a single tangible charge. That House was not competent to deal with such matters. It was not a criminal court, as the hon. gentleman seemed to think. But he challenged him to bring his allegations before a tribunal where they could be properly investigated, and he pledged himself to prove that the whole statement was a tissue of the grossest blunders and misrepresentations. Until the hon. gentleman adopted that course, he should treat his calumnious imputations with the contempt they deserved.

This little evasive speech gave great disappointment to the

House, which had waited all this time in expectation of a contest of angry personalities. A buzz of disapprobation followed, and once this feeling had set in, the tide rose rapidly against the accused. It is one of the infirmities of human nature to kick prostrate lions; and the defamatory discussion which ensued upon the member for Yarlton's speech, showed that the Collective Wisdom was not exempt from the common frailty.

Richard Rawlings had acquired impunity from success; but it was of no avail to him here. He had confidently calculated upon the *prestige* which heretofore carried him triumphantly through all difficulties, and he found it suddenly overwhelmed by ridicule and obloquy. But he was too callous and obdurate to wince under the hits he received, and the only effect they produced upon him was to work up to the surface the natural obstinacy of his character, which exhibited itself in a front of open defiance. In the midst of the tempest, he left the House, and the first person he encountered in the lobby was Lord Charles Eton. Writhing under the disgrace of the scene he had just witnessed, and thinking chiefly of the damage it was likely to inflict upon himself, Lord Charles was not in a mood to temporise with his father-in-law, whose look of bravado at that moment impressed him with a painful conviction of that gentleman's recklessness on the point of reputation. Mr. Rawlings walked straight up to him with a hardihood that quite shocked his lordship's fastidious nerves.

"Well, Lord Charles," exclaimed Mr. Rawlings, plunging his hands into his pockets, and jingling the loose coins he found there, as if he were exulting over public opinion in the abundance of his wealth; "we have had a fine specimen tonight of the justice of the House of Commons. They are resolved to crush me, it seems; but we'll beat them!"

"We?" replied his lordship. "I beg you will not mix me up in the business."

"Then the best thing you can do," said Rawlings, "is to go back and vote for the committee. Let it be entered on the records that Lord Charles Eton is living on a fortune which he believes to have been dishonestly gained."

"If I consulted my own feelings," returned his lordship, flushing up to the roots of his hair, "there could be no hesitation as to what I should do. But you know well, sir, that I am restrained by consideration for the feelings of others.

The taunt is worthy of the coarseness you have exhibited throughout these disreputable transactions."

Rawlings paused for a moment, during which he scrutinized the face of Lord Charles, and then proceeded with marked deliberation. "You think you can prop up your own character by breaking with me at this moment, to show the world how pure and upright you are. I take you at your word. Personally I have done with you;—but for my daughter's sake I will keep a strict watch upon you. I have reason to believe that you are inclined to revenge upon her your hostility to me, and I will compel you to treat her with the respect which is her right as your wife. If I find that you slander me, or show these imperious humours to her, I warn you to look to the consequences."

Lord Charles felt the blood bounding in his temples at these words, which were spoken loud enough for the bystanders to hear; and his pride was galled to the core by the titter that rang in his ears as Richard Rawlings, turning his back contemptuously upon him, moved slowly away through the crowd. The admonition about his lordship's treatment of his wife was too well founded. Margaret had not complained to her family; but a coldness had grown up between her and Lord Charles, which could not be concealed. Mr. Rawlings had observed it, and now that an open rupture had taken place with his son-in-law, he saw in this domestic alienation a means of wreaking some satisfaction upon the Etons for the insults they had cast upon him. His feelings were embittered by desertion and persecution. From the time the committee (which was carried without a division) began its sittings, his aristocratic friends gradually dropped off, and the malice of his enemies increased in energy and venom. The whole world seemed to be rising up in judgment upon him; every man's hand was against him, and his hand was against every man. The only person who clung faithfully to him, and would believe nothing to his disadvantage, was poor Dingle. But even Dingle at last ceased to show himself at Park-lane, and having heard nothing of him for several days, they were beginning to set him down amongst the rest of their fine-weather acquaintances, when the following note was sent in to Mr. Rawlings one morning by a scrubby boy, who waited outside the door for the answer:—

"MY DEAR RAWLINGS,—By some confounded mistake I have been arrested for the inconceivable sum of thirteen thousand pounds, odd. Of

course the thing is perfectly ridiculous, for you know I don't owe a penny in the world. I have been here three days, and would have written to you at once, only I hoped to get out by explaining the matter; but find it's no use. They won't listen to anything. I can't make it out at all. Sorry to trouble you about such an unpleasant business—haven't a friend but yourself I can look to. Will you come or send somebody.

“Yours faithfully, in devilish low spirits, “SCOTT DINGLE.

“Queen's Bench Prison, Thursday.”

If Richard Rawlings was susceptible of a touch of remorse, this note must have awakened it. Poor, airy Dingle had fluttered through the first stages of the panic with a feeling of indifference and security that made this sudden reverse in his fortunes all the more pitiable. Writ after writ had been served upon him, but he treated them as a man might be expected to do, who sincerely believed that he bore a life charmed against writs. Everybody told him that it was only done to frighten him, and Dingle, under the strong wing of Richard Rawlings, was not to be frightened. At length, he was taken in execution, and straightway lodged in the Queen's Bench Prison. In vain he remonstrated in the most gentlemanly manner with the mysterious individual who escorted him there, and who seemed to know as little about the matter as he did himself. The mysterious individual could not even tell him who the plaintiff was, or how the debt was contracted; and when Dingle protested that he didn't owe the money, that he never heard the name of his astonishing creditor before, and, taking out his watch, declared that he would have an action against him for false imprisonment for every hour he was detained against his will, the individual smiled, and said that he hoped he would recover swinging damages.

When this note reached Park-lane, Mr. Sloake happened to be in the house. He had latterly found access to Mr. Rawlings, who, having much business on hand, contrived to make employment for him in a general way as a sort of half-clerk and half-runner. He carried bags of papers to and fro with exemplary diligence, and, always in the hope of getting something better to do, was ready to do anything. To this trustworthy agent was confided a letter in reply to Dingle's application, Mr. Rawlings taking great pains to explain to him the exact location and character of the place he was going to, and the nature of the mission he had to discharge. The matter was of no slight importance to Rawlings himself, for Dingle's evidence was essential to his case, and, even if he were not moved by any better motive on his behalf, it was

necessary for his own sake to exhibit a lively interest in the misfortunes of the incarcerated director.

Mr. Sloake put up the letter very carefully in a leather case he carried in the breast-pocket of his great coat; and set out with infinite circumspection on his nervous journey into the Borough. He had grown very cunning in the streets. Having had his pocket picked three days in succession, and been once knocked down by an omnibus horse, and pitched on another occasion into the window of an oyster shop, he felt the necessity of keeping his eyes open on all sides. Experience had made him wonderfully cautious. He regarded every man that stood lurking about corners with suspicion, never stopped to look at the shops, always kept close to a policeman, whenever he was lucky enough to fall in with one, and wherever he saw a crowd gathering he instinctively shuffled across to the opposite side of the street. By a strict adherence to these rules, which kept his attention painfully on the stretch, he was laboriously acquiring an insight into the art of walking with safety through the thoroughfares of London.

After many tortuous turns and indefatigable inquiries, Mr. Sloake found himself in front of the Debtors' Prison in Southwark. He paused a minute or two to ruminate on the high wall, and the new train of ideas it forced upon his mind. Sloake was not a philosopher; he was more like a youth beginning the world, to whom every incident opened up a fresh spring of curiosity. Here was a debtors' prison, crowded, no doubt, with inmates—poor men who, like himself, had struggled hard to live outside the walls as long as they could, and who were finally borne down by unmerited misfortunes. He thought of the gloom that must reign within, and of the harsh dispensations of fortune that doomed so many suffering fellow-creatures to so melancholy a fate. As he passed through the dark, grated door, and heard the keys clink, and the bolts shoot into their places, his heart sank within him. He had to cross a court-yard where several persons were scattered about, and he hardly dared to lift his head, from a sensitive reluctance to look upon their poor pale cheeks and rueful eyes. All at once he was startled out of his philanthropic reverie by the blow of a tennis-ball which struck off his cap, and, as he went scrambling after it through the crowd amidst yells of laughter, he was so roughly tussled about from one to another, that he was very thankful when

he got safely into the corridor which, he was informed, led to Captain Scott Dingle's room. He was bewildered by the shock; but not half so much stunned by the tennis-ball as by the extraordinary hilarity and wild behaviour of the poor debtors. He concluded that long privation and confinement had turned their brains; and was a thousand times more afflicted by that consideration, than if he had found them all, as he expected, sitting in a row, and looking as dismal as so many monumental effigies. Stopping a little to recover his breath and adjust his cap, then taking out his leather case and extracting Mr. Rawlings' letter from it, he knocked gently at the door to which he was directed. He waited a minute or two. There was no answer. He listened to ascertain if there was any stir within, and presently heard a husky voice giving out the words of a song, so broken and interrupted by snatches of drinking and talking, that he could make neither head nor tail of it. He knocked again, more loudly than before, and was summoned to "come in," with a vehemence that startled him. Opening the door softly, and pioneering his way with his umbrella, he stood on the threshold, rather embarrassed and somewhat alarmed by the aspect of the apartment and its tenants. It was a small whitewashed room. Two or three queer prints and ballads were pasted on the walls. The furniture consisted of a single table, which had formerly been a washhand-stand, and was now, by a little ingenuity, made to answer both purposes, a couple of narrow beds, and a chair; an open cupboard displaying a perfect museum of curiosities; a few stray books, a flower glass, a kettle, bundles of clothes, bottles, jugs, a shaving-case, hair-brushes, a cork-screw, an odd boot, a pair of slippers, an iron pan, and various articles of earthenware, whole, cracked, and chipped. Upon a bed, close under the cupboard, sat a tempestuous, hirsute man of brawny dimensions in his shirt sleeves, with an uplifted glass in one hand, roaring out a "View holloa!" and a "Hark! tantivy! tantivy!" as Sloake appeared in the doorway. The table, which was drawn before him, had been apparently prepared for dinner, and was furnished with a couple of plates, a bottle, a pot of porter, and a loaf. The brawny gentleman was evidently anticipating the festivity, by taking the start of his companion, a tall, thin, pensive man in a showy dressing-gown, who was leaning over the fire cooking something on a gridiron. As Sloake entered, the gentleman in the shirt-

sleeves turning off the end of his "View holloa!" with a sudden jerk of his voice, exclaimed—"What the devil are you standing there for, like a Banshec, letting the wind in on the meat? Shut the door, and tell us what you want."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Sloake, "are you Captain Scott Dingle?"

"I haven't that honour, sir," returned the other; "but there he is as large as life, watching the gridiron through his spyglass. It isn't the first broil he has had a hand in. What do you say, captain?"

"Eh?" cried the captain, "somebody wants me? Wait a minute—done to a nicety! hold the plate—" and lifting the gridiron off the fire, with his companion's assistance, Captain Scott Dingle deposited a large kidney and a steaming steak upon one of the plates. Then turning to Sloake, he inquired,

"Want me? Haven't the pleasure of knowing you—odd style of man," he added, aside to the other.

"Mighty like a process-server," rejoined his friend.

"Damn it," whispered the captain, "they can't serve writs here?"

"It's convenient for the purpose, at all events, for they're sure to find us at home. Don't mind him—go on with your dinner."

"Excuse me, we're not very ceremonious here, you see," said the captain, getting up a slight laugh in one corner of his mouth, "I'll attend to you presently—rather particular about having my steak hot—take a chair, and—no, hang it! There's no chair—find a seat for yourself there on the bed—capital! tender as butter—cooked to perfection—eh, Costigan?"

At the mention of the name of Costigan, Mr. Sloake, who had retreated to the opposite bed, opened his eyes wide, and fixing his green spectacles firmly on his nose, began to gaze with a look of astonishment upon that gentleman.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, after a pause, diving his hand at the same time into the breast-pocket of his coat, "is your name Costigan?"

"Costigan?" exclaimed the other, "my name? What the devil's the fellow fumbling in his pocket for? By my honour," he continued, in an under tone to the captain, "I've a shrewd suspicion he has writs for us both. What's your reason for asking my name, my fine ould bashaw?"

"Certainly—I will tell you," replied Sloake; "I have something for you here."

"I dare say you have," returned Costigan; "but you may put it up again, for I'm not the person you're looking for. I'm somebody else, my darlin' fellow. I'm not him, whoever he is."

"But may be he is somebody to you. Ha! here it is—'Michael Costigan, Esq.'"

"Eh! what is it?" inquired Costigan, "only a letter. You're not trying to trap me now, are you?"

"Trap you, sir? What do you mean? It is a letter for Mr. Costigan."

"Captain," whispered Costigan aside, "will you take it from him?—no service in that, you know,—let us see what it is."

"Allow me," said the captain, taking the letter; "'Michael Costigan, Esq.,' can't be you, of course, I suppose—eh?"

Costigan read the inscription of the letter cautiously over the captain's shoulder, and exclaimed,—“By my honour, but it is me though; it's from that poor lad, Harry Winston. I suppose I must own to myself now, for read that letter I will, if he had a wisp of writs in his pocket. Before I reveal my identity,” he continued, addressing Mr. Sloake, “will you be obliging enough to tell me where you got that letter?”

"Certainly," replied Mr. Sloake; "I got it from Madame Stubb, to leave at the hotel for Mr. Costigan."

"No trick, eh?"

"No—I do not understand you."

"Come," cried Costigan, "tell us who you are; that's coming to the point."

"Who I am? certainly, sir; I am Mr. Sloake, *agent* that was—*ci-devant*, you understand. I live at Madame Stubb, and I come here with a little letter to Captain Dingle from Mr. Rawling."

"From Mr. Rawlings?" exclaimed the captain, starting up; "fire and fury, sir, why didn't you give it to me before?"

"You were on your steak—you like your bifeck hot, you know."

"Ah!" cried the captain, bursting open the note, and reading it with avidity, while Costigan was similarly engaged with Henry Winston's letter; "good fellow that Rawlings—can't come, but will send his solicitor to me—he'll soon settle the business—all right!—capital fellow."

"Poor devil!" muttered Costigan to himself, "that cruel, hard-hearted ould Rawlings has all this to answer for. It'll come against him some day, I'll be bail."

"What's the matter, Costigan," inquired the captain.

"Well, there's no secret in it now," replied Costigan, "but if I had my will of somebody, it isn't hot rolls and coffee I'd be asking him to early in the morning. Coffee! By my conscience, I don't forget the coffee to him. Will you take something to drink, Mr. Coke? We haven't much variety, but you're welcome to what there is—a gentle infusion of gin, and the trifling remains of a tankard of Barclay."

"No, thank you, sir—my name is Mr. Sloake, sir."

"Sloake? a good, ould, amphibious name that," returned Costigan, filling his glass, and draining it at a single gulp, followed up by a wild scrap of a song—

"My name is Teague, and I live in state,
I live above the frowns of fate,
With my stick, stone-platter, and bit o' meat,
And maybe I care for the high and great!"

"But the letter from Winston," said the captain; "what is it, Costigan?"

"Ah! yes, sir, if you please," cried Sloake, coming over to the table; "that poor *garçon*—it will be good for Madame Stubb to hear—she love him, sir, Mr. Winston—when he go to America, and no one hear nothing of him, I think of my *pauvre petit*, my little Eugene—ah! sir, it make my heart very sad."

"Go to America!" exclaimed Costigan; "nonsense—he never went to America—that was only a *ruse*, and all for nothing. There, captain, you read the letter—it's a cramp hand for a man after dinner."

The captain read the letter aloud:

"MY DEAR MR. COSTIGAN,—I wrote three letters to the address you gave me——"

"Never got one of them," interrupted Costigan. "Go on."

"——and send this upon chance to Duke-street, thinking you may call there. Of course you know all that has happened. I will not trouble you with particulars about myself now, but will tell you everything when I see you. I came down here immediately after, and have been on the sick list ever since—very ill. You would hardly know me again. But I am getting round, and determined not to give up the ghost this time. I scribble these few lines to tell you that I am coming to town, where I hope to see you. I intend to make a descent on Mrs. Stubbs, if she can find room for me. At all events, you will be sure to hear of me there.

"Till we meet, and ever, yours faithfully, H. WINSTON.

"Wren's Nest—Saturday.

"P.S.—I often look at your pistols, and wonder shall I ever have any use for them."

"Ha!" exclaimed Sloake, "he come back to his *appartement*—"

ments—I live at his *appartements*—with all my heart he shall come—and good Madame Stubb—oh! certainly, she will open her arms for him. But the young lady, sir—what you say nothing about the young lady?”

“Well, do you know,” replied Costigan, “I think the less that’s said about her the better. Let her down easy. She’s settled for life, and by this time, I dare say, he doesn’t care an old button about her.”

“For his wife, that he run away with? Ah! sir, that is very bad.”

“What are you knocking your head against, my venerable friend? Harry Winston’s wife? Betheshin who tould you he had a wife?”

“Madame Stubb, certainly.”

“Then give my respectful compliments to Madame Stubb, and tell her that’s she labouring under a mental delusion. Have you a wife yourself?”

“*Mon Dieu!* My dear Eugenie—she is gone from me to heaven!”

“Well—that’s more than I can say of Harry Winston’s wife that was to be. She’s gone from him, but I can’t exactly say she’s gone to the same place.”

“She gone too? *Malheureux!* Everybody all wrong—very sorry to see this good man in prison—ah! it was a friend like you, Mr. Costigan, to come and see him—very good friend in his trouble.”

“Not at all—not at all,” returned Costigan, with a sly glance at Dingle: “I don’t take the laste credit for coming here—not the laste in life.”

“The fact is,” said Dingle, “I oughtn’t to be here myself. The rascally lawyers have made a set upon us, but they’ll find themselves in the wrong box. Wait till we get out, that’s all.”

Mr. Sloake raised his spectacles, and looked piteously at Mr. Costigan, shrugging his shoulders, with an accompanying ejaculation, to indicate his regret at finding that they were both in durance.

“It’s by no means so bad a thing, after all,” said Costigan; “I regard it entirely as a mighty great compliment, considering the circumstances.”

“What circumstances?” inquired Dingle.

“What circumstances?” reiterated Costigan. “I’ll tell you in confidence. Before I came here, I had a suspicion that I was rather hard up for credit. You may imagine,

then, how pleased I was to find that, somehow or other, without knowin' anything about it, I owed somebody forty thousand pounds, be the same more or less. That's the sum,—there are sixteen detainers against me—more power to them! The divil a know I know how I did it! But if I had an unencumbered estate, and didn't owe a farthing in the world, I couldn't be much deeper in debt—and that's a comfort."

This reckless way of treating their common misfortune, instead of making Captain Scott Dingle laugh, produced the contrary effect. It was not pleasant to be reminded of these enormous responsibilities, although their magnitude was the very element in them out of which men in their condition could alone extract a solitary hope of escape.

Dingle went to the cupboard, took down a sheet of paper, and wrote a hasty note to Mr. Rawlings; while Costigan was charging Mr. Sloake with a message to Mrs. Stubbs. These little matters being arranged, Mr. Sloake withdrew, after many expressions of condolence, his head confused by the strange discoveries he had made about Mr. Costigan and Harry Winston, and his heart aching for the poor prisoners he left behind him.

CHAPTER III.

VERY SHORT, BUT VERY IMPORTANT TO THE PEOPLE CONCERNED IN IT.

THE panic which penetrated so many homes in the fatal year of 1845, found its way into the gorgeous mansion in Park-lane at last. Mrs. Rawlings was shockingly alarmed. She did not know exactly what she had to fear, and her ignorance magnified the danger. Mr. Rawlings was by no means communicative with her; all she could get from him was an assurance that there was nothing to apprehend; but this had the effect of rendering her so nervous, that she made it a point to cross-examine everybody that came to the house in the hope of procuring some intelligence. She was constantly on the stairs watching and listening for knocks; and whenever she could intercept any of Mr. Rawlings' visitors she would beckon them into the drawing-room, and try to extract a little private and confidential news from them. That the information she obtained in this way aggravated her alarm is not improbable, for she grew thinner and more fidgety every day, and when any one spoke comfortingly to her, showed symptoms of an inclination to go off into hysterics.

Clara exhibited more firmness. The mental suffering she had passed through had imparted a seriousness to her character which prepared her to meet worldly calamities with composure. Her sister's marriage to some extent relieved her of the weight that pressed upon her spirits, and left her free to think for herself and about herself. From that time the house was no longer the home it had been to her. Wealth had brought them all into a factitious world, had broken up their domestic ties, sowed discord between father and daughter, and placed them in a false position in society, which was now becoming painfully oppressive. She longed to escape out of that poisoned atmosphere, and to be at peace in seclusion. The vivacity of her nature was gone, but the strength of her will remained, and was not slow in shaping a course of action for the future.

London seasons have as quickening an influence as the hot air of the forcing-house. Feelings that take a long time to grow up to maturity in the open climate of the country, germinate with wonderful rapidity in the drawing-rooms of London. Clara discovered this fact before the expiration of her first season; but she was not easily dazzled by her admirers. There was safety in the multitude of them, and, so long as liberty was a pleasure to her, she had no inclination to part with it. Her universality, however, did not last long; and she took a different view of human life and its enjoyments when corroding anxiety had begun to make havoc of her gaiety. Most of the brilliant men who had hitherto pressed themselves into her train, disappeared with one excuse or another, soon after Mr. Rawlings' name became associated with charges of corruption and malversation. A few of them yet lingered behind, cautiously hanging about her to wait the issue of events, and ready to advance or retreat according to circumstances. But there was one whose quiet devotion had undergone no alteration, and who had early touched her heart, although she never thought proper to acknowledge it to herself until the approach of contumely enabled her to distinguish between the true love and the false—if a woman's sagacity can ever be said to require the help of such a test.

George Farquhar was the son of a merchant, had a share in the house, and was possessed of a competence ample for the modest ambition of a private gentleman. There was nothing whatever striking in his manners or appearance, and it was necessary that you should become very intimate with him before you could discover the good sense and integrity of cha-

racter that lay beneath his calm and unpretending exterior. He was a man especially calculated to inspire confidence amongst those who knew him thoroughly—a man who made little show or profession in time of prosperity, but whose truth and fidelity might be relied upon in adverse circumstances. It was when the clouds were lowering over the doomed house in Park-lane that his attachment for Clara became manifest to her in a form which she was no longer disposed to treat with indifference. By what ways he made known his feelings to her—how the mystery gradually took an intelligible shape—how the distant admirer insensibly drew closer and closer, and warmed into the ardent lover—what confessions were extorted on both sides—how Clara tried his patience at first—how she relented at last—and how it came to pass that she finally yielded to his suit, and pledged herself to him, without consulting anybody on the subject, are matters which need not be dwelt upon. It was a very earnest piece of love-making between them; very earnest and grave in its opening, and fixed and irrevocable in its close. No two people in the world were ever bound together by bonds of their own choosing whom it would be more difficult to separate.

It has been said that when a gentleman looks tenderly at a young lady in England, she turns her head aside, and, dropping her voice over her shoulder, murmurs, "Ask papa." Clara did not desire Mr. Farquhar to ask papa. She took the responsibility of the matter upon herself, and told him for the present to say nothing to papa about it. It was certainly not a very opportune time for the introduction of such a subject. Mr. Rawlings had as much business and vexation on hand as would have given work enough to the nerves of half-a-dozen men. But he was equal to the work of half-a-dozen men in the way of business and vexation; and, except that he looked now and then a little more austere than usual, nobody could guess the prodigious quantity of labour and annoyance he was literally ploughing through every day. Clara was aware of this, and thought it would be unreasonable to trouble him with her love affairs at such a moment. But she had other motives for desiring to delay the delicate confession. With so much anxious occupation preying upon him, it was exceedingly doubtful what sort of reception her father might give Mr. Farquhar. She was determined not to expose her lover to the risk of a temper which had left such deep scars upon her memory. Nor was this all. Who could foresee how her father

would come out of the harassing ordeal through which he was passing? Would it be honourable to commit the man she loved any further until the result should be known? Would it be wise, for his happiness or her own, to admit any ground for regrets or reproaches in the future? If the event should be disastrous, it would put the affection of her lover to the severest proof, and, at all events, leave him free to act with the full knowledge of her position. On all accounts she considered it desirable for the present to keep her engagement concealed from her father. The same necessity, however, did not exist with reference to her mother or her sister; and, shrinking from the imprudence of contracting such a pledge, without confiding it to some members of her family, she determined upon revealing her secret to Mrs. Rawlings and Margaret. From the latter she received unbounded sympathy. Margaret was rejoiced at the prospect of so delightful a settlement for her darling Clara, and urged her to be firm under all circumstances, and, whatever opposition might be offered to it, not to sacrifice her happiness—as she had done! Bitter experience had done its rough work with the gentle Margaret.

Upon Mrs. Rawlings the announcement had a very different effect: it nearly produced a fit of hysterics. The recollection of what had happened on a former occasion—her dread of Mr. Rawlings' violence—and horror of the consequences should he ever come to the knowledge that she had concealed the secret from him, threw her into a state of nervous excitement that was absolutely alarming. She did not in the least blame her daughter for accepting the proposals of Mr. Farquhar. She gave no opinion upon that. She only blamed her for telling her anything about it. She ought to have had more consideration for her poor mother than to bring her into such a business. And dear, chattering, frightened Mrs. Rawlings went about the house, and up and down the stairs, listening at the doors, and watching the hall, with this dreadful secret on her conscience, more terrified than ever.

Thus, while Mr. Rawlings was plunged over head and ears in piles of papers and Blue Books, working through a chaos of accumulating difficulties, his family were engaged in a clandestine design against his authority. How strangely the turns of fortune sometimes vindicate the ends of justice. Behold the Man of Gold standing on the pinnacle of the Ladder, assailed by obloquy abroad and conspiracy at home!

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THE GREEN WILLOW SHOWS SYMPTOMS OF TURNING YELLOW.

ANY man may drive a coach and six through an act of Parliament. To keep close to the letter of the law, to flirt in the very mazes of the web and laugh at the spider, is an ordinary exploit. All throughout the searching investigations of Sir Peter Jinks' committee, Richard Rawlings was able to give a colourable justification to every item of the charges brought against him. He had the law on his side, let equity or public opinion decide as they might. But it was necessary for his defence to procure the liberation of Dingle and Costigan. Their evidence was indispensable. They had signed cheques innumerable, of the destination of which they knew nothing—it was enough that they could swear to their signatures. Every transaction was perfectly regular. There was the chairman, and his quorum, or chorus, of two directors, and the secretary who entered everything duly in the minutes. What was it to the purpose that they were creatures of his own? Each particular was duly vouched, and incontestably legal. But how was the liberation of these important witnesses to be effected? To anybody else it would have been difficult—Rawlings alone possessed a necromantic influence over the railway attorneys. This requires a little explanation. The law was vague and unsettled. It was impossible to decide who was responsible and who was not. The judges had ruled both ways and every way; and their decisions contradicted each other so flatly, that if precedents went for anything, every man was safe and no man was safe.

In this state of affairs creditors saw that it was rather a costly experiment to try the question of liability with men of straw. But how were the men of substance to be got at? The proofs of their liability were contained in the official registers of extinct or scattered boards. And where were they? Absconding secretaries had dropt tears upon the records, and spirited them away.

Now, it was quite clear that Dingle and Costigan were men of straw; and when Rawlings offered to supply the names of a few solvent directors, with a private understanding that the proofs of their liability should be forthcoming, on condition that the proceedings against his friends were abandoned, the

creditors eagerly closed with so advantageous a proposal. And so Dingle and Costigan were liberated at once, an exchange of hostages common enough in that happy age of chicane.

When Dingle found himself in the open air again, he fluttered round and round like a bird that, after being limed on a bough, has suddenly disengaged itself, and is trying its air-cells in chirping circles about the green woods. Down to Westminster and back to Park-lane, and exulting through St. James's-street and Pall Mall, his recent vexations had no other effect on him than that of a victory. He knew all along it was merely an attempt to frighten him, and he was now more triumphant than ever. The examinations before the committee were not quite so agreeable. They endeavoured to make him confess that he was a mere instrument in the hands of Rawlings, at which he showed great indignation, and was immediately desired to confine himself strictly to the interrogatories that were put to him. They next cross-questioned him about the election for Yarlton, and tried to extract a confession from him that upon that occasion he acted as a catspaw, which threw him into such a rage that they ordered him out of the room. Mystifications of this kind met him at every turn; but he flung them off with juvenile elasticity as long as his funds lasted. When scrip was no longer convertible into cash, and nothing remained on hand but a quantity of waste paper, once preserved as a treasure of similar potency to the inexhaustible purse in the fairy tale, it was easy to see that his high spirits were rather forced and unnatural. His life was no longer a pleasant morning dream at the Colonnade Hotel, and a saunter on the sunny side of the street, with his gallant bamboo swinging between finger and thumb; he dwindled insensibly down to an obscure bedroom and the cheap eating-houses, into which he would dart in the dusk of the evenings with his coat buttoned up round his ears, and his hat over his eyes, so that nobody should know him. Still, through all transformations and vile tricks of fortune, Captain Scott Dingle maintained the same easy and negligent air that had always distinguished him. All was threadbare with him, save and except the gentleman.

Costigan took the matter differently. He bewildered the committee. They might as well have examined *Punch* himself. Instead of affording them information, he made them laugh. The contrast between him and Dingle showed what a sway Rawlings exercised over men of the most opposite character, for while the one was evidently innocent of all inten-

tional deception, the other was as evidently guilty of it; yet both were equally the dupes and agents of the master-spirit.

The first thing Costigan did, as soon as he got out of the Bench, was to inquire after Henry Winston; and he had the satisfaction of being informed by Mrs. Stubbs that she expected that young gentleman in town the following evening at nine o'clock. Costigan was punctual to the time, and arrived just as Henry Winston drove up to the door. Mr. Sloake had been accommodated in the attics to make room for the new comer in his old apartments.

Henry Winston was grievously changed. He had grown pale, and thin, and nervous. "Men have died," says Beatrice, "and worms have eaten them, but not for love." But there is a living death that is not put at rest in the grave. And Henry Winston had suffered it. The body survived, but the heart had perished. The brightness of youth had fled from his face; his animal spirits were extinguished; there was no enthusiasm left to stimulate him to exertion; he took no pleasure in the life around him; and every exertion he made to effect an interest in it, was visibly an effort as painful as it was unsuccessful. He lighted up instantly on meeting Costigan; but, as he pressed his hand, old memories (they were old to him, and seemed to have gone back years and years into the mists of childhood) came upon him, a hectic colour mounted into his cheeks, and he turned away his head to stifle his emotion.

Mrs. Stubbs overwhelmed him with welcomes, and even Mr. Sloake, with Eugene looming out at his elbow, could not help coming clattering down the stairs to shake hands with him. Mrs. Stubbs had provided a little supper in his own apartments, and almost looked as if she expected to be asked to stay and partake of it. Her anxiety to hear all that had befallen him carried her beyond that strict line of etiquette which she prided herself upon observing towards her lodgers, and Costigan's gallantry was put to its last shifts in dexterous devices to get rid of her. At last they were alone.

"Now," said Costigan, "you must eat something before we open our budget. There's a roast fowl that might pass for a turkey in the dark. Just try a wing."

"I don't think I can eat anything," returned Harry; "let me see you begin."

"You're tired? Ah! my poor fellow, the room brings

back the ould trouble. Don't think of it now. I was in hopes by this time it was all forgotten."

"Forgotten!" cried Harry, "I wish it was—I try to forget it—but that morning it is swimming before me now—it is always before me. No matter! we'll talk of it by-and-by. What's this?"

"Well," said Costigan, "I suppose Mother Stubbs means it for sherry. Try a glass of it. Wasn't it very odd I never got your letters? Where did you direct them to?"

"To the address you gave me."

"It's easy to say we live under free institutions—and the freest institution in it is the Post-office, for it does what it likes. The irregularities of that establishment are enough to engender a revolution. Another glass of wine—not so bad!"

"Do you ever see anything of the Rawlingses now?" inquired Winston.

"I see Rawlings himself,—I saw him to-day; and I've a strong suspicion he's beginning to break down."

"I'm sorry to hear it. He treated me ill—but I have no hostility against *him*."

There was a pause, and then a little conversation, which led to an inquiry from Costigan as to what became of his friend on the morning of his unaccountable disappearance. Henry Winston, to whom the question seemed to be a relief, at once related the circumstance that occurred at the park gate. He spoke in a low tone, and his manner was composed and collected.

"What could I think?" he said; "there she sat, with the only man in the world I had any reason to regard as my rival—the man she had over and over again protested she would never encourage—the man she had made me solemnly promise, on the faith of her pledges to me, not to seek a quarrel with. She first enjoined to be patient, and then—the whole thing seems like a horrible dream. Why did she deceive me? Why, why, why, I have asked myself a thousand times. Did she do it to increase his triumph, and give him a heartless proof of her attachment by sacrificing me before his eyes?"

"But are you sure it was *her*?"

"Sure! Do you think it possible I could be mistaken? She looked at me—looked full at me—and smiled! I shall never forget it—that bent head is for ever before me—at night I cannot close my eyes upon it—it is before me in the

morning the moment I waken. It is surprising, Costigan, that I have preserved my senses. Often and often I meditated something—God forgive me! I hope I have vanquished that cowardly thought! I can talk calmly to you about it now, for time has accustomed me to it; but it has eaten into my life—it is killing me.”

“Come, come,” said Costigan, “this will never do. A young fellow like you mustn’t fret yourself to fiddlestrings in this way. She isn’t worth it.”

“That reflection, too, has come to my relief,” returned Winston; “there have been moments when I felt that she was unworthy of my true-hearted love, and pride has helped me to struggle against it—but in vain. It was only to sink back again into despair. After all, why should I struggle any more? I have nothing to live for.”

“You don’t mean to say seriously that you still love this woman?”

Winston for a moment buried his head in his hands, and then slowly raising his eyes looked at Costigan.

“Listen to me quietly, and spare your arguments, for you can urge nothing that I have not urged to myself again and again. She loved me once—loved me with her whole soul; if there was deceit in her, then the angels are impure, and there is no trust in anything human. What happened afterwards I know not—why or how that black infidelity entered her heart is inscrutable to me. But my reliance is upon her early love, her first, true, deep, passionate feeling. There is a gulf—wide as the heavens—dividing us; but let her be what she may, I cannot help remembering what she once was to me. Nor can I believe that she has forgotten it.”

“My dear fellow,” cried Costigan, filling his glass, and pushing the decanter over to Winston, “you’re labourin’ under a melancholy delusion. *Why* a woman pretends to love a man when she doesn’t, is a conundrum that’d baffle ould Nick himself; and as to the past—it’s a mighty easy way they have of forgetting what it’s inconvenient to remember. You’re only deludin’ yourself. She has given you up for good and all; and I wonder you haven’t more spirit than to waste a thought upon her.”

“There’s the point, Costigan. I once thought as you do. I believed that if the woman I loved had been false, I should have flung her from me with scorn. We all think so before the trial comes.” Winston was silent for a moment, and

then resumed. "I would cheerfully relinquish my life if I could see her for one moment, to tell her that I forgive her."

"Rather a dangerous experiment," cried Costigan. "Take my advice, and keep clear of her. Why did you come to town?"

"I wanted change of scene. My sister got married and went away, and the place was lonely; and, in fact, I was sick of the country."

"There is an old saying,—'The longer the chain, the heavier the weight.' But any place is better for you than London."

"Well, we'll not talk of it," said Winston; "I wish you would tell me some news."

"Do you know," cried Costigan, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking searchingly at Winston, "I'm not quite satisfied with the account you give of yourself. Why didn't you come back here that night?"

"I couldn't bear it. I was ashamed of what had happened. No man likes to be baffled, and have his feelings trifled with; and, hardly knowing what to do, I walked about half the night, lurked in the Park the whole of the next day, and then, in a paroxysm of fury, made off into the country, determined to let her see how indifferent I was. Brave, wasn't it, Costigan?" he added, with a bitter smile.

"It's a wondther you didn't write to her?"

"Write? I *had* written to her; gave my letter to her sister, and never got an answer. It was in that letter I made the appointment, and there can be no doubt she got it, for she kept the appointment, kept it with a vengeance, by bringing *him* to the spot to point me out to him. Had I known as much then as I know now, I should have taken my revenge upon the spot."

"Much better as it is," observed Costigan; "let them have rope enough, and the devil a doubt but they'll give you your revenge in full."

"What do you mean?"

"Only a bit of a scrimmage between Rawlings and Lord Charles. You know they live in the uncle's house?"

"That dreary house! I dined there once; and it recalls an incident which ought to have opened my eyes. What a fool I have been, Costigan, not to have perceived it all long ago. They live with the uncle?"

"Ay, and a pleasant time they have of it. Lord William's

a mighty stiff ould buck, and wouldn't touch one of the Rawlingses with the end of a pair of tongs. He's as proud as Belzeebub of his dirty blood, and marches up and down amongst the family pictures like a sentry, for fear, I suppose, somebody would steal one of his fusty ancestors—bad luck to the kit of them, and their health to wear it! You may be sure he crowed like a bantam when Rawlings was attacked about the railways, and there has been the devil to pay between them. The butter's out of the stirabout. Lord Charles has turned his back on her family, and if she hasn't reason by this time to repent of her bargain, she must have wonderful beat-in' out in her."

"Has there been a quarrel?"

"What else could be expected from such a match? The young wife, poor thing! has found out to her grief that it was for her money he married her. Better for her to be dead than to be doomed to live with such a cold-blooded snake."

"Does he ill-treat her?"

"Oh! I'll answer for it he does nothing you could lay your finger on. But there's more ways than one of breakin' an egg, and the worst of all ways is to let it fall. And that's just what he's doing with his wife."

"Costigan!" cried Harry Winston, leaning across the table, and grasping his friend by the arm, "this is more than I can bear. When that man married her, I cast jealousy to the winds. I knew him well—I knew he could never make her happy—but I had no right to be jealous. She was his—lawfully his—and, crushed as I was, I bore it, and resolved to wrestle with the feeling of hatred he had inspired. For her sake—for her sake, Costigan, whom I loved, whom I love still—whose place never can be filled in the heart she has broken—I stifled my vengeance. But now—now," and, starting from his chair, he paced the room in a state of high excitement.

"Easy weather!" said Costigan. "What has got into your head now?"

"My poor Margaret!" exclaimed Henry Winston; "we never can be anything to each other. But that you should be wretched too! Costigan, I could have suffered for her a thousand deaths, and this misery should have worn me out without a word of complaint or reproach so long as I thought she was happy. If this were the last word I had to utter, I swear solemnly that I would have died rather than she should know the anguish I am enduring. I would have spared her

that. But she is now as wretched as I am myself; and she is brought to this by him who has made life a burden to me."

"True enough," replied Costigan, "but there's no help for it."

"Help!" cried Winston. "We shall see that. As sure as there's a God in heaven I'll avenge her wrongs and my own."

Costigan saw the humour he was in, and that it was useless to argue with him. It was evident that Winston was too glad to seize upon any pretext for quarrelling with Lord Charles Eton, and that it would have been injudicious at that moment to offer any strong opposition to his design. Costigan, therefore, contented himself by simply advising him to be careful what steps he took in the matter, and, above all things, to throw the *onus* on Lord Charles. "If anything comes of it," he added, "remember, my darlin' boy, I'm your man!"

"You know," said Costigan, after a soothing exordium, which was specially calculated to produce an inflammatory effect, "it's the easiest thing in life to put your opponent in the wrong, so that whatever happens nobody can blame you. I'm a great enemy, on principle, to duelling—when it can be avoided. There are cases, of course, when there's nothing but a shot can settle a difference of opinion between gentlemen. And when it comes to that—there's not a word more to be said. But whether this is a case of that kind, I'm not exactly prepared to say. It requires consideration. One thing for your comfort I can tell you, that you couldn't be in better hands for an impartial conclusion upon that point than Mick Costigan's; and if it should appear that there's any reasonable ground for fighting his lordship, I don't hesitate to acknowledge that there isn't a gentleman of my acquaintance I'd have greater pleasure and satisfaction in going out to see pinked."

While Mr. Costigan was delivering the concluding words, he was also employed in drawing the cork of a second bottle of sherry, for the obvious purpose of sitting down to discuss the merits of the question *in extenso*. Winston was in the right mood to acquiesce in this proceeding. He was elated at the prospect of any desperate suggestion that was likely to bring him into collision with the man he hated so cordially; and we are afraid that there was mixed up with his eagerness on this occasion a sinister hope, too vague and fluttering to take any definite shape, in which Margaret had more concern than in

his wiser moments Henry Winston could have fairly justified to his honour or his conscience.

They sat long together, and their conversation took many crooked and confused turns, carrying them far into the small hours; and the tangled hum of their voices indicated that their conference traversed sundry topics, and was, upon the whole, of rather a speculative and desultory cast.

CHAPTER V

AN EXPLOSION.

MR. MICHAEL COSTIGAN had by no means exaggerated the perils that surrounded Richard Rawlings. In fact, matters were worse than he suspected. Bills in Chancery, actions at law, and the discharge of heavy balances upon unsettled accounts, had made such fearful inroads on the colossal fortune of the railway millionaire, as to reduce it to a dubious speculation whether he should be able to stand his ground. In this extremity, a new enemy appeared in the field. This was the old Earl of Dragonfelt, who thought it a favourable opportunity to try to recover the borough, and procure a transfer of the mortgages on his estates to more friendly hands. The notable scheme was detected by Crikey Snaggs, who had been tampered with by some of the earl's agents, and who lured them on till he wormed out their design, which he immediately communicated to his master. Crikey was not to be bribed, and the turn which affairs were taking made him more staunch than ever, in the interests of his benefactor.

Crikey alone was behind the curtain, and witnessed those private moments, in which the racking anxieties so successfully concealed from the world, involuntarily betrayed themselves. He was proud of his post of confidence, and, regarding himself as a functionary deeply engaged in the secret service of his master, he seemed to have as many eyes in his head as a fly; was close, wary, and full of stratagems, and stopped at no artifices by which he could fish out information from the people who came with letters and inquiries to the house. A strange mixture was Crikey Snaggs, uniting to the cunning and subtlety which are the frequent characteristics of deformity a courage and fidelity not always found amongst handsome and well-shaped men.

The intelligence thus obtained concerning the Dragonfelts determined Richard Rawlings to nip their design in the bud. He had not forgotten the old grudge—the scorn of the truculent peer, and the supercilious insolence of Lord Valteline and his mendacious toady, Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe. The opportunity of wreaking a complete revenge was now before him.

Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, the meanest of the crew, had already worked ample poetical justice upon himself. That vivacious little gentleman had no sooner been deprived of his seat for Yarlton, the only hold he had upon the Dragonfelts, than his noble patrons unceremoniously dropped him. Lord Valteline alone kept in with him; but it was solely for the sake of using his signature on bill-stamps, and employing him as a scout among the discounters. This was a connexion that could not last very long. Dishonoured acceptances brought Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe to a stand-still. He had hitherto filched a fluctuating living out of the discounts by cheating both his friend and the money-lenders, whom he took good care never to bring face to face; but an exposure of some of his complex frauds having unluckily taken place, he was blown upon as a person who did not possess even the sort of honour which is said to be sacred among thieves. Fortunately he had a large acquaintance amongst that class of swindlers who have ostensible offices in the inns of court, or flashy addresses at the West End, and who carry on a widespread system of plunder with an appearance of credit and respectability. The chief victims of these professional sharpers may be catalogued as elderly, estated gentlemen who are ready to cut off entails, and pawn their posterity, for the gratification of their craving vices—young men of family let loose upon town, who are equally ready to sell their fathers and mothers for an unrestrained indulgence in the pleasures of the *coulisses*, the hells, and other resorts of fashionable vagabondage—officers in the Guards—profligate spendthrifts holding patent offices under government—expectant clergymen—and needy members of Parliament. Out of this floating population, half knaves and half dupes, a thriving trade is at all times to be driven by the dealers in post-obits, notes of hand, and warrants of attorney. No man understood the complicated machinery through which the plant is made, and the victim trapped, better than Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe; and, with a view to an elaborate series of depredations upon the public, he got up a firm under a fictitious name, and advertised ex-

tensively (without sixpence in his pocket) to lend money on approved securities in any sums from five hundred or a thousand upwards; none but principals to be treated with; and the strictest secrecy observed. Unfortunately the firm was not very long in existence when an impatient gentleman, who had trusted an acceptance in their hands, and could not get it back again, brought the case under the notice of a police magistrate, and Mr. Pompey Ragstaffe, taking alarm, made his escape to Boulogne, leaving his confederates to get out of the scrape as well as they could.

Mr. Rawlings thought it a pity that Lord Valteline should be divorced from his friend; and having it in his power to promote their re-union by foreclosing the mortgages, he made up his mind to bring the great Dragonfelt estates to the hammer. The proceeding was severe—but it was an act of retribution, not altogether indefensible on the score of justice. The consequence was the total prostration of that noble house. The earl, old, decrepit, and full of venom, paralysed in his own toils, was put out like a crippled pensioner to live upon a small annuity; and Lord Valteline, hunted from post to pillar by legions of desperate creditors, saw that the game was up, and, dropping down the river at midnight in a crowded steamer, bade adieu, for an indefinite period, to his native land.

This affair was productive of great scandal at the West End. It was the common topic at the clubs. Lord William Eton made no disguise of his indignation, and, glad of any excuse to show the world the contempt he entertained for Mr. Rawlings, took special pains, wherever he went, to proclaim his scorn of that gentleman. Even Lord Charles was tempted out of his usual caution and reserve; and was so anxious to express his disapproval of an act which consigned one of the oldest families in the kingdom to a state of dependency, that he wrote a letter to the old earl, in which he declared that Mr. Rawlings' conduct had given him the greatest pain, and that he felt it necessary, for the satisfaction of his own feelings, to assure his lordship that he had for some time ceased to hold any intercourse with that person. During an angry correspondence, which afterwards took place between the earl and Mr. Rawlings, his lordship was mean and spiteful enough to enclose this very letter to the father-in-law of the writer.

At home, Lord Charles took no trouble to conceal the mor-

tification he suffered from the odium that was gathering over his wife's family. The freezing *hauteur* with which he treated Margaret when her father's railway transactions first began to be talked about, soon settled down into indifference, and it was but a step from indifference to something that might almost be called aversion. In a thousand little nameless ways, by the tone of his scanty conversation, and, above all, by his distant and lofty manner, he kept that conventional gulf that lay between them perpetually before her. He let no opportunity pass of making her feel the superiority of his birth and position. As they sat at breakfast or at dinner, they seemed to her to be separated as widely apart as if "mountains and seas rose up and rolled between their hearts." There was not one point of attraction to draw them together, and the points of repulsion increased day by day.

Tenderness and love were as essential to Margaret as air is to life itself. She had never looked for love in this marriage; but she believed herself secure of contentment—the stagnant calm in which sensitive natures take refuge from the wreck of happiness. She had not calculated upon the inadequacy of the qualities she ascribed to Lord Charles, even if he possessed them, to satisfy the wants of her heart. She had deceived herself in supposing that she could subsist upon dull amenities and cold respect; although, had there been no worse, she might have lived on very quietly to all outer appearance with a dreary void in her affections; and had Lord Charles been wise, he might have filled that void, and won back from its secret anguish a heart that was too much alive to kindness not to be susceptible of generous emotions. But he sacrificed that heart to his pride. Selfishness stepped in between him and the true happiness which might have graced his life, and turned the issues of that unequal union to bitterness and ashes. She bore it all in silence. She never complained. How could she put into words the small wounds inflicted by looks and tones? How could she describe the minute items of hourly humiliation—the slights which were so plain to her, and invisible to the rest of the world—the trivial indications of systematic neglect—the growing antipathies—the slow sundering of sympathies, wishes, interests, and of all ties of domestic feeling which had hitherto bound them to each other? Her complaints were not in words—but in the pale face, the sad eyes, and wasted health.

Soon after the downfall of the Dragonfelts, there was a

little dinner-party at Park-lane,—quite an accidental gathering, got together at a short notice. Mr. Trumbull, who was always hovering about collecting social statistics for the book upon English life which he intended to publish the moment he returned to America, happened to make a call, and was invited by Mrs. Rawlings. Then there was Mr. Farquhar, whose dreadful secret put Mrs. Rawlings upon thorns every time he came into the house; and Mr. Trainer, the literary friend of the Baroness de Poudre-bleu, who had lately disappeared all of a sudden, an event which awakened Mrs. Rawlings' curiosity so violently, that she asked Mr. Trainer to dinner on purpose to talk to him about it; and Lord Clickerly, a young exquisite of high breeding, one of the last drops after the shower of Clara's aristocratic admirers.

The party was unexpectedly increased by a visit from Margaret. She came only to sit an hour with her sister; but they would urge her to stay. She confessed that she did not expect Lord Charles home to dinner, that he said he thought he should dine out, and that she was not to wait for him; but then he might come, and she would not leave him to dine alone on any account. Mr. Rawlings overruled all these objections, and finally decided the difficulty by sending an express messenger to Portman-square, to say that Lady Charles was dining in Park-lane.

The dinner was a decided success. It passed off with much clatter and vivacity, to which everybody contributed in turn.

Mr. Trumbull entertained the board at intervals with remarks upon English habits, especially where they differed from the habits of America; Lord Clickerly, who had a singularly thin voice, like the upper notes of a bird, chirped in every now and then with brief comments on Mr. Trumbull; and Mr. Trainer, in the pauses of the high debate, came out with something strong on the literature or politics of the day.

A lively discussion arose between Mr. Trumbull and Lord Clickerly on the relative value of time in England and America. Mr. Trumbull maintained that he "could tell a man that was London raised from one that was State bred by that infallible test."

"By what test?" chirped Lord Clickerly.

"By the simple test," replied the other, "of putting 'em down to dinner together; and, if the State man wouldn't beat your Engländer to a stand-still, I'm an alligator, and you may

eat me alive, that's all. I have made my speculations on most of your European customs, and I have come to this conclusion, that there is no human being, under Almighty compass, can go-ahead with his dinner like an American. I do expect we're a long chalk ahead of you in that line. And if that ain't an everlasting proof of the value of time, I wonder what is!"

Lord Clickerly, who had hitherto fought hard for the English, abandoned them at this point, acknowledging with a lambent smile of derision, that the Americans beat them in voracity.

"Do you hear what Mr. Trainer says of the baroness, Rawlings?" said Mrs. Rawlings, who had been engaged in a low conversation with that gentleman. "Do tell Rawlings. You know we're all friends here,—now, there, go on, that's a good creature."

"I'm afraid," replied Mr. Trainer, glancing down the table under his eyebrows, "it will look malicious—and I am the last man——"

"If you make a mystery of it," said Rawlings, "we shall suspect it to be something worse than it is."

"No mystery at all," returned Trainer; "the fact is, the baroness has disappeared," looking down the table again with an under glance, full of suppressed information.

"Disappeared!" lisped Lord Clickerly; "why, we knew that already. Can't you tell us any more?—The honour of a glass of wine, Lady Charles?—We want the full particulars."

"Come, come, Trainer," exclaimed Mr. Rawlings, "let us have it at once."

"I say, Rawlings," inquired Lord Clickerly, in a whisper, "who is Trainer?"

"An author," returned Rawlings.

"No!" rejoined his lordship, fixing a small gold eyeglass on his right eye, and scrutinizing Trainer; "who the doose would guess that, to look at him?"

"Everybody knows," said Mr. Trainer, clearing his voice, "that I was on the most confidential terms with the baroness,—in fact, she consulted me in everything; but latterly I was utterly ignorant of her movements. The last time I called she was out." (Here Mr. Trainer threw in a significant cough, which made them all laugh.) "I understood what that meant. When I called yesterday, she was gone; and I found a little sallow man in possession of the house, holding

high altercation with a red-nosed fellow, that looked big enough to eat him up at a single mouthful."

Mr. Trainer glanced round for a laugh, and then went on.

"The little sallow man was the landlord, and the red-nosed fellow was a deluded individual, who imagined that he had some claim on the establishment, which the landlord was by no means disposed to admit. As the baroness had not consulted me on the matter, I declined to interfere; but the little sallow man would insist upon telling me all the particulars."

"And what were the particulars?" demanded Trumbull, who looked as if he were taking notes with his eyes.

"Oh! the old story, but very creditable, I must say, to my friend the baroness. The fact was she had made up her mind to go abroad, and economise. Now that's the worst that can be said of her; for nobody has a right to hunt up her private affairs. Hundreds of people go abroad to economise, you know; only she did it rather abruptly. But I have no doubt she had good reasons for that."

"No doubt!" echoed Lord Clickerly.

"Really," said Mrs. Rawlings, growing all at once quite pathetic, "I am quite sorry for the poor baroness. I wonder what's become of her son."

"She posted him off," exclaimed Mr. Trainer, "to his uncle, Lord Huxley, who has never seen him, and has always declared he never will; and he'll keep his word."

The conversation turned naturally from the baroness to her book, which Mrs. Rawlings declared to be "very clever," an opinion which seemed to be endorsed by the company generally.

During these observations, a strange satirical smile was quietly settling on the face of Mr. Trainer; who, with his eyes fixed upon his plate, was amusing himself idly turning over a bunch of grapes with his fork. There was something so remarkable in his look that it attracted Mrs. Rawlings' notice.

"You know it's very clever, Mr. Trainer. I have heard you say so yourself," said Mrs. Rawlings.

"Perhaps I may have said that the book was clever; but I don't think," and here he smiled more strangely than before, "that you ever heard me say anything about the author."

"What! not about the baroness?"

"The baroness!" exclaimed Mr. Trainer--and here his

mysterious smile became quite formidable. "You are very good-natured, Mrs. Rawlings, very. But do you really believe the baroness wrote that novel?"

"Of course I do. Haven't I heard her speak of it a hundred times? Isn't her name on the title-page?"

"Quite true—incontestably true," returned Mr. Trainer; "but the name on the title-page is not always an infallible proof of the authorship;" and he laid a humorous stress on the word *infallible* that set them all off tittering. Never did the dissection of an absent friend yield such involuntary pleasantry

"It's very shabby of you, Mr. Trainer," returned Mrs. Rawlings, poutingly, "it is really provoking of you to throw out such dark hints about the poor baroness, and to say that she didn't write her own book."

"Did I say so?" said Trainer.

"No, not exactly; but——"

"And if I did—there's nothing very extraordinary in that. Did anybody ever think the baroness could write a novel? I knew her pretty well, and *I* never could discover her literary capacity."

"Oh! then," observed Mr. Farquhar, "it is only surmise after all."

"Excuse me!" returned Mr. Trainer. "The baroness never wrote a book in her life. A friend wrote that novel—a friend—and she implored him to let her put her name to it to give her a little *éclat*. In a moment of weakness and mistaken kindness that friend yielded." Mr. Trainer raised his glass to his lips, and drinking it slowly off, to conceal a grand emotion, fixed his eyes upon the ceiling.

"Hem!" whispered Mr. Rawlings; "we needn't ask who that friend was."

"I reckon we see *him* pretty clear," observed Mr. Trumbull.

"Capital, though, wasn't it?" cried Trainer, "to see how the poor baroness used to pass it off as her own, and swallow the flattery wholesale! One thing is quite certain, that had it been published as mine, nobody would have read a line of it—but a baroness!"

"Well," said Mr. Rawlings, "you have contrived to work a moral out of it after all, which is more than I expected;" then, thinking that the conversation had been carried far enough, he conveyed a hint to Mrs. Rawlings, by a telegraphic signal well understood between them, that it was time for

the ladies to withdraw. A little hubbub of chairs and rustling of silks, and the gentlemen were left to themselves over their wine. But they soon afterwards broke up.

The drawing-room was unusually merry. One might have thought that the misfortunes of the baroness had infected the whole party with the most riotous spirits. This rebound from the calamities of others, which may be observed amongst even the most good-natured people, shows us how quickly individuals drop out, are dismissed, and forgotten in the whirl of life. But we mustn't stop to pick up moralities. The evening was vanishing imperceptibly (being now past ten), when a servant announced that the carriage had come for Margaret. Everybody was taken by surprise, for she had not ordered her carriage till eleven; but it appeared it had been sent by the direction of Lord Charles, a discovery which called up a sudden shadow over the face of Mr. Rawlings. Presently Crikey Snaggs glided into the room, and dropping close to his master's chair, whispered—

“He's in it—I saw him sitting behind the blind.”

“Who?”

“Lord Charles himself.”

“Ho! Lord Charles is below, is he?” adding aloud, “Give Mrs. Rawlings' compliments to Lord Charles Eton—regrets he should stay at the door—begs he will come up and wait till her ladyship is ready.”

Crikey Snaggs, who did not hold Lord Charles in his especial love, was delighted to be charged with this message, which he did not use much ceremony in delivering.

There was a general hush and subsidence in the room. They were all aware of the terms on which Mr. Rawlings and his lordship stood towards each other, and awaited the issue in profound suspense. Margaret made a movement to leave the apartment, and thus avert any unpleasant consequences; but Mr. Rawlings would not suffer it, and had already set the general conversation again in motion, as if there was no such person as Lord Charles in question, when the door opened, and his lordship appeared upon the threshold. He looked pale and haughty, and the whiteness of his lips not only betrayed his passion, but the evil way in which passion affected him. Glancing for a moment round the room, he made a ceremonious bow to Mrs. Rawlings, recognised Clara with a slight wave of his hand, and advanced at once to Margaret, without taking notice of her father.

"I am sorry, Lady Charles," he said, "to take you away from your friends; but if I had been aware you had an engagement, I should not have made arrangements for the Opera this evening."

"The Opera?" returned Margaret; "I was ignorant of your arrangements, but I am quite ready to accompany you."

She was, indeed, eager to go; anything to get Lord Charles away. But Mr. Rawlings placed his hand on her arm to hold her back, and turned to her husband.

"Is it for the purpose, Lord Charles Eton," he demanded, "of publicly displaying your disrespect for your wife's relatives that you come to my house, sit in your carriage at the door, and send up a message by a servant for my daughter, instead of waiting upon her yourself?"

"I meant no disrespect, sir," returned Lord Charles.

"I don't know what you meant—I can judge only by your acts. For myself, I despise this petty slight; but I am resolved that my family shall be treated with courtesy; and if my daughter feels what is due to herself, and to us——"

"You really must excuse me," interrupted Lord Charles, anxious to bring the colloquy to a close—"this is not a time. I feel I ought to apologise," he added, turning blandly to the company, "for being the unintentional cause of exposing these domestic differences."

"Hypocrite!" exclaimed Mr. Rawlings; "it is you, not I, who have published our differences to the world; who made the breach and widened it, and trumpeted abroad that you have felt it necessary for your own credit to disavow your wife's family. You have made public property of our family affairs. I have hitherto been silent, my lord," he added, in a voice husky with passion, "but I will spare you no longer."

"Disavow your family?" said Lord Charles, somewhat superciliously. "The supposition is absurd."

"Do you deny that you have industriously circulated amongst your friends, not by hints, and whispers, and innuendos, but in the plainest and most offensive language, that you considered it due to your own character—a thing of starch and paint, which a shower of rain would wash into the kennel—to hold no further intercourse with me? Do you deny this?"

"I am at a loss to comprehend you."

"Then I will enlighten you."

During this rapid dialogue the company distributed about the

room exhibited their discomfort and uneasiness in various ways. Mrs. Rawlings, at a distance behind Mr. Rawlings, was making imploring signals to Lord Charles, whenever she fancied she caught his eye, in which she was generally deceived; Margaret had partially turned away, and only ventured to look timidly over her shoulder, now and then; while Clara and Mr. Farquhar sat apart, revolving the matrimonial disclosures in their own minds, and thinking, doubtless, what a very different sort of life they should lead when they were married. Lord Clickerly considered it good fun, and Mr. Trainer stood scrutinizing the group with morose eyes and beetling brows. Mr. Trumbull alone took a direct and active interest in what was going forward, and drawing over his chair, and placing his elbows on his knees, leaned forward to watch the progress of the scene, with a view to make a special chapter of it in his book on the domestic life of the English.

"Then I will enlighten you," exclaimed Mr. Rawlings, drawing a letter from his pocket; "here is a letter you wrote to the Earl of Dragonfelt—I see you remember it—in which you volunteer an opinion upon transactions between his lordship and myself, of many years' standing, and of the merits of which you were as ignorant as the sheet of paper on which you wrote, begging of his lordship to believe that you entirely disapproved of my conduct, and that, indeed, you—you!—had already broken off all personal intercourse with me."

"By what means did you become possessed of that letter?" demanded Lord Charles.

"By what right, sir, did you presume to thrust yourself into my affairs?"

"By the right, sir, which every gentleman is justified in asserting—the right of vindicating my own honour."

"Your honour!—cobwebs!—what had your honour to do with my business?"

"Simply this, that I am connected with you, although I *do* hold no intercourse with you, and that I will not suffer the shadow of a suspicion to fall upon my name from any act of yours. You take advantage of the power which the law places in your hands to hunt down a noble family, and, without giving them time to enter into any arrangements for the preservation of their property, you turn them out of their estates, and embitter the declining age of a nobleman of irreproachable character. The law was designed for the protection of honest men, not to abet the practices of usurers and money-jobbers."

"Pray economise your clap-traps for the reporters' gallery," retorted Mr. Rawlings; "they are lost here. Again I ask you, why you presume to interfere between me and the Earl of Dragonfelt?"

"I will not answer you further. I am not called upon to explain any part of my conduct to you. It is enough that I feel justified to myself in having expressed my abhorrence of a proceeding which must fill every honourable mind with indignation."

"Who told you this fine story about taking advantage of the law? Where did you pick it up? Did you stop to ask whether the Earl of Dragonfelt had done anything on his side to provoke this extreme measure? I grant you it is an extreme measure; but the law which was designed for the protection of honest men, as you say, calls for extreme measures in extreme cases, and sanctifies them by the name of justice. It will hang extreme villains sometimes, and I do not find that people write to their families to express their abhorrence. Did you ask anybody how long this mortgage had hung over the Dragonfelt estates? What indulgences I had already given? What scorn and insult I had endured from the man whose credit and station I had saved at a critical moment? Did you inquire whether that respectable old nobleman had returned my forbearance with treachery, and condescended, through his agents and hirelings, to bribe my servants, in the hope of getting at my private papers? Did your honourable mind make any of these inquiries before it took upon itself to abhor my proceedings?"

"Most unquestionably I never dreamt of making any such inquiries."

"Yet, wholly ignorant of the circumstances, you assumed to yourself the right of pronouncing an opinion upon my actions; and this you call asserting the right of a gentleman! Why, the earl himself, who is as cunning as a serpent, and as sharp-eyed as a ferret, must read your fawning parasite character through and through, and despise you as heartily as I do. You thought it a grand thing to stand well with your order, to show a generous sympathy for a ruined lord. Had he been a man who had built up his own fortune, like me, you would have let him rot in the mire before you would have opened your lips to utter one word, unless it were a word of opprobrium. Lord Charles Eton, we must understand each other better henceforth—let the distance between

us be clear, wide, and impassable—be careful how you advance one step upon it.”

“I am happy to think that the distance between us *is* impassable; and it shall certainly never again be trespassed upon by me,” retorted Lord Charles; “but before I leave you, I again demand by what means that letter came into your possession?”

“Do you suppose I came by it surreptitiously?”

“I do. I know more of your history than you suspect; and can readily believe that a man who could turn a deathbed confidence to his own ends—the deathbed of his benefactor—is eminently capable of surreptitious practices. Come, Lady Charles, my arm is at your service.”

As he spoke, his face whitening with gall, he offered his arm to Margaret; but his last words had taken so strange an effect on Richard Rawlings, who seemed overwhelmed by astonishment rather than shame or anger, that she stood gazing in fear and irresolution upon her father, hardly aware of the action of Lord Charles. His lordship again proffered his arm to her in silence, but she did not observe him—her eyes were riveted upon her father’s face, in which, for the interval of a second that elapsed during this movement, there was an incomprehensible expression of mixed surprise and hesitation, as if he were trying to gather up memories of things forgotten, and to trace their connexion with the dark allusion of Lord Charles. But his lordship was not disposed to await the result; and, withdrawing his extended arm, muttered in a low voice to Lady Charles, “Perhaps you will follow me,” and left the room.

This sudden action recalled her to a full consciousness of her situation. Mrs. Rawlings and Clara came to her, apparently to prevail upon her to stay a little longer, till she had recovered from the agitation into which this painful scene had thrown her. She looked like a person awakening from a dream—a heavy stupor seemed to have locked up her senses—and when it passed away, she made a violent effort to collect herself for the struggle it was necessary to make.

“No—no,” she whispered, “no—no—I must not stay—my duty lies there—God bless you! mother!—sister!—He shall have nothing to reproach me with—I will speak to him alone—and if it comes to parting, it must be clear and open, and before the world—not thus—not thus!” As she went towards the door, two or three of the gentlemen hastened for-

ward to attend her, but she waved them back, and went out alone.

When she was gone, everybody was standing about the room with an air of embarrassment.

"I am sorry our little party should have been so unluckily broken in upon," said Mr. Rawlings; "pray be seated, gentlemen."

"As far as I can judge," observed Mr. Trumbull, "there's no occasion to repent it. It was a noble manifestation on your part, Mr. Rawlings; and in the name of every free-born man I must tender you my gratitude for your magnificent vindication of the rights of the many against the usurpation of the few. That's the way I look at it. Reduced to its elements, in a popular sense, it was a complete triumph of democracy over aristocracy, and no mistake; and I reckon if we had you in Congress, we'd make everlasting smash of the fine people in our country that ape the exclusive views of your society. The fact is, Mr. Rawlings, these marriages never come to good. The graft won't take; and you'll never have a wholesome state of things in this country till you clear the snags out of the water, and let the current of industry free—the live human tide, that must go boiling down, whether you like it or not; it's a fact that if you attempt to dam it up by unnatural impediments, it will burst the banks at last. You may set that down as an eternal truth, Mr. Rawlings."

This speech was delivered chiefly into the ear of Mr. Rawlings, who was standing close to him; but there was no time for a reply. The guests were already taking their leave, and half way out of the room. As they were retiring, Mr. Rawlings drew Mr. Farquhar back. "Let them go," he said; "I wish to have a few words alone with you to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOVER AND THE HUSBAND.

To what conclusion the conference between Henry Winston and Mr. Costigan finally led, it would have been difficult for either of them to determine. It left so complicated a network of crude strategies in their brains the next morning, that no one particular point could be said to be more clear or satisfactory than another. Strange, indeed, would it have been had it turned out otherwise; for it surpassed even the ingenuity

of Mr. Costigan to discover any justifiable pretext Mr. Henry Winston could set up to himself for making an onslaught on Lord Charles Eton. The more they sifted the matter, the more obvious it became, not only that he had no right to interfere with Lord Charles, but that, if he did, he would give him a direct advantage, with all the respectable sympathies to back him. Henry Winston allowed himself reluctantly to be convinced of this at last. But, although he saw the necessity of dealing with Lord Charles on independent grounds, he by no means relinquished his fixed determination to throw himself in his way, and leave the rest to chance. For several days he made a diligent promenade in the neighbourhood of the clubs, and through the principal streets at the west end. But he might have exercised himself in this way for twenty years, and not have met the man he wanted. He might miss him twenty times a day by the breadth of a brick at the corners of streets, or by the shadow on a shop-threshold, or by taking the wrong side of the street, or by looking in at a window, or looking round when he ought to look straight before him. Pins in bundles of hay are not more obstinate in their whereabouts than gentlemen who are looked after, without knowing it, in the streets of London.

How little Lady Charles, in the solitude of her dismal house, suspected that there was a young man going about town all day long looking for her husband, with dire intent more haggard than his looks! We wonder did it chance to her in any of those solitary hours, when the heart is so apt to live over its old memories again, to expend a thought upon Henry Winston? Did she ask herself how the estrangement, and sudden eclipse of his love came about, and think, with a shuddering doubt, that she ought to have cleared it up before she raised a barrier between them for ever? And it was now too late for repentance, too early for doubts! If she did, if she yearned with regret towards the past, and looked with dark misgivings on the present and the future, who was to blame? Her husband, at least, who should have obliterated all such feelings, instead of leaving them to prey upon her in loneliness and desertion, had no right to complain of the change they wrought in her.

One night, Henry Winston, weary of a wretched day of disappointments, wandered into the Opera, with the same object incessantly before him. The lustre of the scene, the buzz of voices, the stories of whole lives in their spring and decay, revealed in the fluctuating incidents that marked the

movements of the surrounding groups, not a stir of which escaped him, recalled with many keen and bitter pangs the evening when he had last visited this very place with the man whom, of all the world, he now most wished to encounter. Several times he fancied he saw him—but was still disappointed. It was growing late; he had scrutinized every box, ran eagerly over every head in the stalls, with the same result, when his attention was attracted by the opening of a box, which had been hitherto vacant, on the grand tier. A lady and gentleman entered. The gentleman came quickly to the front, and glanced with an appearance of impatience about the house. Henry Winston knew him by instinct, before he recognised a feature in his face. It was Lord Charles Eton at last! The turn of his shoulder, the easy grace and confidence of his action, and that calm, statuesque face and sculptured shirt, could not be mistaken. Henry Winston's heart bounded as if the blood in it were leaping to get free. In a moment or two a lady, who had lingered at the back of the box, advanced slowly to the seat looking towards the stage, and drawing the curtain forward, took a chair behind it. Her face was almost wholly screened from the audience, and her figure, muffled in a large white cloak, could not be sufficiently made out to help the speculations of the watcher below. Henry Winston fixed his glass upon the box, and did not lose an articulation of those who sat in it. For some time the lady was motionless, while Lord Charles was scanning the circles and scattering about recognitions from the tips of his fingers. They didn't exchange a word. At length Lord Charles flung himself back in his chair, and, although Henry could not see his face, he felt that he was speaking. The lady moved a little forward—she was fluttered, and pushing aside the curtain, apparently to avoid the conversation, turned her face towards the audience. The light of the old enchantment fell once more upon Henry Winston! There was a great change—the pallor of a death-sickness was in her cheeks, and her eyes betrayed an expression of profound sadness; yet still there was the same sweetness, the same entrancing beauty, he remembered so well. With a wild tumult of emotions he sat and gazed upon her, intently observing the progress of the dialogue which was going forward. Lord Charles was speaking with considerable emphasis, twitching his glass backwards and forwards, sometimes stooping out over the box, and sometimes standing up, by way of

making a pantomime to perplex the scrutiny of inquisitive *lorgnettes*; but Henry Winston could see that he was speaking vehemently all the time, and the most vehemently when he desired to appear most unconcerned. Sometimes Margaret turned and spoke—once with marked animation; and then Lord Charles, after an energetic movement in the shadow at the back, suddenly left the box. When he was gone, Margaret fluttered a little with her fan, then laid it down, and hid herself again behind the curtain. Henry Winston caught a glimpse of a white handkerchief, and fancied she was in tears.

If he had followed his first impulse upon seeing Margaret alone, he would have instantly gone to her box; but one fatal thought rose before him, like a spectre, and warned him to take any direction but that. There was little time for reflection. As he turned from the box, he saw Lord Charles in the lounge within a few yards of him, looking as cool and indifferent as if nothing in the world had lately happened to ruffle his tranquillity.

A mist passed over Henry Winston's eyes—the house seemed to swim round him; the intolerable calmness with which Lord Charles sauntered through the crowd, aggravated his offences tenfold. Had he shown a tinge of emotion when they met,—as they did all at once, face to face,—Henry Winston might have felt it as a rebuke to the violent passion that agitated him; but there was not the slightest change in his lordship's face, except a faint and somewhat lofty expression of surprise.

"Ha! Winston," exclaimed Lord Charles, "how d'ye do? What has become of you all this time? How d'ye do, Forrester—how d'ye do?"

"I have looked eagerly for this meeting, Lord Charles Eton," cried Winston; "things have happened since we met last that have altered our positions towards each other."

"Things are happening every day, my dear Winston," returned Lord Charles, "that alter everybody's position. Very true, as you say"—here his lordship nodded, with a most gracious smile, to a lady on the grand tier—"I don't think I have seen you since my—marriage."

"No—it was a subject upon which you were not very likely to wish to see me."

"And why not? Still as sentimental as ever? My dear Winston, you must be more a man of the world. You shall positively come and see us."

"My lord!" exclaimed Winston, "I'm not in a humour to be jested with. I have sought you, Lord Charles Eton, and my purpose is with you in private. Let us retire from this place."

"Retire, Winston? Quite impossible. Lady Charles is upstairs—there, go and talk to her; and if you wish for a private scene with me, you shall have it whenever you please to honour me with a visit. Lady Charles will be delighted to see you, and I promise you I sha'n't be jealous in the least."

At this moment Lord Charles had got into a crush of people he knew, and in the pressure Henry Winston was separated from him. He was bewildered by the indifference and frankness of his lordship's accomplished manner; and the open invitation to visit Lady Charles took him by surprise, and directed the current of his thoughts into a new channel. The temptation was too great to be resisted. Whatever reception he might meet from Margaret, he could, at all events, plead her husband's sanction for intruding upon her, and he would gain the opportunity, for which his wayward love had long panted, of speaking to her, and getting some explanation of the mystery in the darkness of which they had been so strangely sundered. This was sweeter to him than vengeance—which, after all, it only postponed, perhaps to heighten and refine its zest. He was not very well acquainted with the lobbies of the house, but love is a keen guide through the most difficult labyrinths. Arrived at the door of the box, he hesitated for a moment, and when the boxkeeper came to his help and opened it, he felt himself trembling violently. Lady Charles was the first to speak. She did not recognise him till he came near the front.

"Mr. Winston!"—there was a slight convulsion in her voice, but she controlled it, and drawing herself quietly up, waited for an explanation.

"You are surprised to see me," said Henry; "but not more surprised than I am to find myself here."

"I am sorry Lord Charles is not here to receive you."

"It was Lord Charles who desired me to come. I should not otherwise have ventured to intrude upon you. I feel, Lady Charles, that I have no right to ask a few minutes' conversation—perhaps I ought not—but there is something due to past memories—to present suffering—I entreat you to forgive me if I say one word which I ought not to utter in the altered circumstances under which we meet."

"I cannot believe, Mr. Winston, that you could say anything I ought not to hear."

"When we last parted, there were pledges between us——"

"Upon that subject I cannot—will not—hear you."

"Well—I will only speak of it as a matter gone by, in which neither of us have any further interest than to clear up doubts which, so far as I am concerned, render my life miserable. I have sustained myself up to this hour, only in the hope that some day I should have from your own lips an explanation——"

"You amaze me. Explanation?"

"I beg it from you as the one solitary favour I shall ever have to seek in this world from her who——" his voice faltered.

"This is unreasonable—unjust; it is wrong, Mr. Winston—I cannot suffer it," said Margaret.

"Do not fear," returned Henry; "I know what is due to your position, and will not compromise it. When we parted—I ask this to ease me of a load of wretchedness that presses upon me day and night—a few words, and it will all be over—we had promised each other—no matter! you remember all that—I will hasten to the end—your father insisted upon this marriage—well, I wrote to you—I believed then that your heart was mine——"

"To what end is this?" cried Margaret.

"I proposed the only alternative open to us—that you should fly with me. I sent that letter by your sister."

Margaret looked confused, as if she did not quite understand him.

"What letter?"

"Two days after your father desired you to receive Lord Charles Eton."

"No—no—you are mistaken—you forget—you never sent me such a letter—no—no——"

"Try to recollect—you are agitated. I mentioned that I should wait for you in the Park. You remember?"

"No—you are confounding things. I never heard of such a letter. Sent to me by Clara?"

"Endeavour to recal the circumstance. I waited at the appointed spot. It will be clear to you, if you can remember the morning when you drove out with your father and Lord Charles. You recollect?"

"Let me think. Yes—I do remember that morning—but nothing about you."

"I entreat you to look back and think—did you not see me? Waiting with a carriage? Think—think—what horrible mystery is this?"

"Never—I never saw you—never heard of such a letter."

"What fiend has done this? I saw you as plainly as I see you now—and I believed you came to mock and humiliate me. And it was not so?"

"It was not so," returned Margaret, in a voice almost inarticulate; "no—I heard nothing from you—I was led to believe that you had left the country—I heard other things—but I believed in nothing but your silence. That was enough, and it closed all between us. We must speak no more on this subject; and I should not have said so much, but that I would not have you think me capable of doing a wrong to you or others. Be satisfied and leave me."

"Great God!" exclaimed Harry, "could your sister have suppressed the letter? She had it, and knew its contents—and knew the misery I was enduring—slight to what I have endured since, and to the horrors of the future. And this marriage followed, without bringing you happiness, while it consigns me to despair!"

"I cannot listen to such language. Happiness! We must seek for happiness in the discharge of our duties. You have the explanation you desired—resignation and hope must be sought elsewhere—not here—not in conversations like these—and now leave me—leave me. Lord Charles is in the pit. He is looking up—had you not better rejoin him?"

"I will," cried Henry Winston; "if I have given you pain, forgive me—Margaret! There, it is the last time. If you should ever think of me after this night—think kindly of me. God! my heart will break!" and he rushed out of the box.

As ill fortune would have it, he met Lord Charles in one of the passages. The wild expression of his face startled his lordship, who rarely suffered himself to be betrayed into astonishment at anything.

"Why, my dear Winston," exclaimed his lordship, "what is the matter?"

"Come this way, Lord Charles Eton," retorted the other, "and I will tell you."

"Why can't you tell me here?"

"We shall be more private this way," cried Winston, drawing him towards the extremity of the passage, where it was comparatively dark and retired.

"I told you," he continued, "that I sought this interview with you."

"Well, I am here. What is your object?"

"To tell you that you have availed yourself of your rank, your station, your influence to undermine your friend, and blast his prospects. To tell you that your conduct to me has been base and treacherous; and to demand from you that satisfaction which, as a gentleman, I have a right to seek at your hands for the wrong you have done me."

"Come, come," returned Lord Charles, "this is carrying sentiment a little too far, Mr. Winston. I beg you will explain what you mean?"

"Explain? It ought to be explicit enough. I brand you, Lord Charles Eton, with falsehood and treachery. You have done me a wrong that cries out for atonement, and must be satisfied. It is useless to shift and equivocate. I know your subtle and devilish nature well—but you shall not escape me. Give me an answer, if you would not provoke me to extremities."

"Give way, sir, and let me pass. If you have any demand to make upon me, seek a proper opportunity."

"Coward!" exclaimed Winston, wrought upon to a height of ungovernable rage, "will nothing move your stagnant blood!" then drawing his hand violently, he struck him on the face, at the same moment flinging his card upon the ground.

The incident caused a slight commotion amongst a few gentlemen who witnessed the latter part of the rencontre. One of them stepped forward, and, picking up the card, handed it to Lord Charles Eton. In the mean while Henry Winston had passed out rapidly into the street.

BOOK THE SIXTH.

AS YOU SOW, YOU MUST REAP.

CHAPTER I.

CONTAINING CONFIDENTIAL DISCLOSURES.

"MR. FARQUHAR," said Richard Rawlings, when they found themselves alone after the departure of Trumbull and the rest of the guests, "I wish to consult you on a business that affects me nearly, and I hope you will be open and frank with me."

Mr. Farquhar was a man of few words, and on most occasions listened rather than spoke. There was something in Mr. Rawlings' manner which led him to suppose that the communication related to Clara; and being desirous of hearing what Mr. Rawlings had to say before he committed himself, he answered by a slight inclination of his head.

"What I want is a sincere opinion," continued Rawlings, "without any reserve or delicacy on my account."

Mr. Farquhar made a second inclination of his head.

"You heard what Lord Charles Eton said just before he left the room?"

"I did," returned Farquhar, somewhat relieved, and at the same time, perhaps, a little disappointed.

"In what sense did you understand it? Should you, as a dispassionate person, regard it as an accusation, or merely an innuendo?"

"Certainly," replied Farquhar, after a moment's pause, "as an accusation."

"That I had taken advantage of a deathbed confidence for my own purposes?"

"It appeared to me so."

"Do you believe it?"

"You can hardly expect me to answer that question. If you ask me whether I believe you capable of such an act, I have no hesitation in saying that I do not."

"If you do not believe me capable of it, you must surely discredit the charge?"

"That by no means follows, Mr. Rawlings. Here is an alleged matter of fact, of the truth or falsehood of which it is impossible for me to know anything. A particular charge cannot be rebutted by merely opposing to it a general reputation."

"Then no man is safe in standing upon his character?"

"Certainly not, when a specific allegation is made against him."

"And, although a man's life were as pure as the life of an angel, he must defend himself whenever malice or slander may choose to assail him?"

"Such a man owes it to society no less than to himself. It will not do to say, 'My life is an answer to all calumnies.' No man's life is known."

"I am glad to have your opinion on this point, for it exactly coincides with my own. You think I ought to disprove this charge?"

"I see no alternative."

"Your counsel is sound and clear, and relieves me of some serious scruples I had in reference to others whom I would rather not have compromised. I can prove this charge to be base and groundless, but considering the weightier affairs in which I am engaged before the public, I confess I have a reluctance to go into a court of justice with my son-in-law."

"Such a proceeding is not to be contemplated, Mr. Rawlings. The matter simply requires an explanation through a mutual friend."

"Will you be that friend? I do not affect any hesitation in asking you. Will you undertake to see Lord Charles?"

"If you think I——"

"To your prudence and discretion I would gladly confide my vindication; and if you have no personal objection——"

"Oh! none whatever. But you must furnish me with the means of disproving the statement."

"Not in the first instance. Lord Charles has made an assertion—it is for him to establish it. By throwing him upon his proofs we shall get at the source of the slander, and I may be spared the necessity of opening up matters which I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose, except as a last resource."

"You are the best judge of that; but I must have some particulars to go upon. Was there ever such a deathbed confidence as he spoke of?"

"Suppose there had been, how could Lord Charles, or anybody else, know the nature of it?"

"Subsequent circumstances, perhaps, might have thrown a light upon it."

"But there were none—not a single circumstance that could afford the slightest clue to the subject of that confidence."

"Then there *was* such a confidence, Mr. Rawlings?"

Richard Rawlings saw at once that a shadow of doubt had fallen on Mr. Farquhar's mind, and that having gone so far, it was necessary to go farther. Resting his head on one hand, as if he were collecting himself, and thinking how he should shape his disclosure, after a little while he commenced, slowly and deliberately—"I began the world in a struggle for bread. My first knowledge of life was want, hardship, and oppression. I saw others of my own age, with no better natural title to a happy destiny, fostered by household affections, and strengthened by the love of kindred, for the careers that lay before them. There was not one human face into which I could look for sympathy. Poverty is comparatively a small evil when it is tempered by the consolations of home; but I had no home. I was thrown upon the world to live or die as I might. I fought for life alone—utterly alone from childhood—everybody was privileged to trample upon me; and they did trample upon me, and crushed at the outset the yearnings of my heart, and all its youthful and hopeful instincts. While I was yet a boy, a child—with a child's longing desires, and dreams of holidays—the weight of years had fallen upon me in a scourge of drudgery that turned the child's blood to gall. Thus I began—you see to what I have raised myself."

"An instructive history, Mr. Rawlings," returned Farquhar; "honourable to your industry and perseverance."

"Simply the result of circumstances, that left me no choice but self-reliance. My character, for good or evil, was formed in the friendless isolation which showed me that I had nothing to depend upon but my own exertions, and no hope of rendering life supportable but by carving out an independence. My whole energies were concentrated upon that object. No pleasures tempted me aside; no ties encumbered me; I had neither attachments to distract my efforts, nor burdens to impede them. Well—it was at the very opening of my life the circumstance occurred to which Lord Charles alluded. My employer—not my benefactor, as he called him—was dying. I had served him as all drudges serve their task-masters, worked thankless ly

for him, and was ground down to the bare point of subsistence, without any recompense in the way of kindness or encouragement, for he was mean at heart, suspicious, and tyrannical. But when he came near his end, the wretched miser was so naked of friends that he turned to me, whom he had treated like a dog, as the only person he could trust with a secret that was labouring in his mind. It was his secret, and not mine, and I have no right to divulge it except in my own defence. I undertook a duty he enjoined upon me, and I have discharged it, not merely to the letter, as some men might have done, but have exceeded the measure of his injunction ten times over. So far, Mr. Farquhar, you are in possession of all the facts necessary for you at present, and you have my authority to state that the allegation which charges me with having abused that man's confidence is a gratuitous and malignant falsehood. Are you satisfied?"

"Perfectly."

"When do you propose to see Lord Charles?"

"The sooner the better. To-morrow."

"There is something more I wish to say. You place me under an obligation by this service, and I thank you for it. Is there no way, Mr. Farquhar, by which I can render you a return?"

"You overrate the service, Mr. Rawlings. It is too slight to call for a return."

"Not slight to me. I will have no disguise with you. I look round amongst the large circle of people who from time to time pressed their services upon me *when I didn't want them*, and I could not now pick out one who would incur the risk of appearing publicly as my friend. They shrink from me as if I were spotted with leprosy. You can comprehend, then, how much I prize the support of an honourable man at a moment when the world, that flattered and caressed me a few weeks ago, is loading me with obloquy."

"I should think very meanly of that man's friendship, Mr. Rawlings," returned Farquhar, "who showed it only in the sunshine. As for myself, I really am entitled to no thanks—I beg you will not consider it in that light."

"You enhance the obligation, Mr. Farquhar, by making it appear so trivial. Come—be as frank with me as I have been with you. I am anxious to testify to you the value I place upon your friendship."

"The expression of such a desire is grateful to my feelings, but——"

"But! We shall never get to the end of our business if we are to be stopped by buts. I suppose I must speak plainly. The happiness of my daughter is not an object to which I can be indifferent; and if you, too, are interested in it, why are you not more explicit with me?"

"Explicit?—I——"

"Am I right in my conjecture?"

"Since you have alluded to the subject, it would not become me to deal otherwise than openly with you, Mr. Rawlings. It was my intention to have spoken to you, and to have asked your sanction—but—I was unwilling to trespass upon you at a time when I knew you were harassed by other matters. Your considerate kindness has relieved me from that apprehension. It is true, sir, that I am interested in the happiness of your daughter, and want only your approval to give me a title to make her happiness the business of my life."

"I should not have led you to this confession, if I intended to withhold my approval. You are not one of the common herd of men who are carried away by hasty impressions, or who hunt women for their fortunes. I will not ask you whether you have maturely reflected upon this step. I give you credit in advance for acting with good sense as well as good feeling; and it is for that reason that I desire to be perfectly candid with you before we go any farther. My position, Mr. Farquhar, is altered since you first came to this house. Do not be deceived upon that point. My resources are crippled. The rich man of yesterday may be a beggar to-morrow."

"Such a calamity would be a source of infinite regret to me—but it would make no change in my feelings towards your daughter. Perhaps it might bind me the more strongly to her."

"I never could have expected this kind of romance from Mr. Farquhar," observed Richard Rawlings, smiling.

"Say reason rather than romance. I fell in love with Miss Rawlings, not with her expectancies; and I am happy to say that my own fortune renders me independent of such considerations."

"And you should not be disappointed if you discovered that this young lady, with whom your reason had fallen in love, the daughter of a reputed *millionaire*, should turn out to have no fortune after all?"

"The truth is, I never made any calculations about it, simply because I had no necessity. If fortune comes, as an

incident, it is welcome; but as the main plot of the drama, I have long learned to consider it extremely liable to break down. We live for better things than money, Mr. Rawlings; and I have seen enough of the world to be satisfied that the wealthiest house does not always ensure the happiest home."

"You have learned that piece of wisdom in good time. May it prosper with you!" exclaimed Rawlings, with an emotion which slightly trembled in his voice. "You are right. There are better things to live for—love, respect, repose. I have wrung from the world this lesson, which you have calmly gathered from observation. It has come late—but not too late to profit something by it. All is not lost yet. In Clara's happiness we shall find some compensation for the wreck of poor Margaret's life. There went ambition—and how has it ended? Misery, masked by rank and fortune. I know it. But, you will ask, why, with my knowledge of mankind, I sacrificed my child? I will tell you why. I hated the conventional pride that looks down with contempt upon obscure birth and its upward struggles; and it became a passion with me to raise myself to a height that would enable me to subdue it to my own ends. In that marriage I accomplished my desire: let ruin come, I have plucked out the purple sin, and shown its hollowness to the world. Could you heap my floors with gold, Mr. Farquhar, it would be a less satisfaction to me now, than you will bestow upon me by making Clara happy. Your hand—thanks! and good night. We are not quite beggared yet. Gold has done its work, and we will look, as you say, for something better and worthier to live for. Love each other, be true and trustful,—keep your minds healthy and your hearts pure,—and you will be richer a hundredfold upon a crust than if a mine were casting up its treasures at your feet."

Thus ended the interview, supplying Mr. Farquhar with much strange matter for reflection. Revolving in his thoughts all that Mr. Rawlings had revealed to him, and taking into account the frank tone of his disclosures, the extraordinary career they mapped out, and the sound sense, and even excellent feeling he displayed, considerably heightened in the appreciation by his unexpected kindness about Clara, Mr. Farquhar upon the whole formed a higher opinion of Mr. Rawlings than he had ever entertained before. He believed that there lay a better nature under that hard and repulsive exterior than the world had given him credit for; and he

was disposed to conclude that the accusations which had been brought against him in his public capacity were at least greatly exaggerated. He was very willing to believe the best. He had a direct interest in putting a most favourable construction on Mr. Rawlings' character, and in helping to vindicate it from aspersion.

There was an ingredient also in the circumstances in which he was placed that was peculiarly attractive to a man of Mr. Farquhar's turn of mind. Richard Rawlings, whatever dark spots there might have been in his life, was paying a heavy penalty for them,—shunned by his former parasites,—and now, probably, as much a bankrupt in fortune as in reputation. That was not the moment to desert him. Mr. Farquhar fancied he could see through all that bravery of speech the ruin that was closing rapidly upon him, and over which his self-sustaining pride had, after all, thrown but a thin veil. He suspected that Rawlings' affairs were in a more desperate condition than he would suffer himself to acknowledge. There was altogether a sort of fascination in the adversity of a man who had single-handed elevated himself to a pinnacle of power and influence such as few men, backed by the greatest opportunities and advantages, had ever attained. He recognised a certain grandeur in his rise that flung its broad light over his fall, and invested it with special interest. And in addition to the motives which thus led him to feel a deep anxiety in the troubles that were gathering round one whose prosperity he had to some extent participated in, his attachment for Clara suggested a reason more powerful than all the rest for showing himself at this crisis as the staunch friend of the family. And he was the only friend they had, after all the pomp and splendour they had wasted in the cultivation of troops upon troops of fine acquaintances.

The next morning Mr. Farquhar stood on the threshold of his door, hesitating whether he should go down the street or up the street—his heart pointing one way and his head looking the other—or rather his heart pointing both ways at once, for it was charged with much latent kindness, and was as well inclined to do a service to Mr. Rawlings, as to render suit and homage on that happy morning to Clara. The truth was, he hesitated whether he should go to Clara, and announce the joyous tidings that he had obtained her father's consent, or in the first instance see Lord Charles and discharge his promise to Mr. Rawlings. But the former seemed

to give a selfish preference to his own feelings, and he accordingly took the direction that led to Portman-square, thinking all the way, we are reluctant to admit, more of the delight with which Clara would receive his news, than of the reception he was likely to get from Lord Charles Eton.

CHAPTER II.

FULL OF BELLICOSE MATTER.

A HEAVY fog brooded over the streets of London. It was a brown fog with streaks of dingy yellow in it. To all external appearance the flags were quite dry, but you felt that you were looking at them through a false medium, and that the atmosphere around you was loaded with invisible water, held in suspense by the mysterious chemistry of Nature. You expected every moment that it would begin to rain, but it did not rain for all that. The shops, as you passed along, loomed upon you like strange outlines and confused colours heaving in a mirage. Wherever there was a light within (for although it was yet scarcely noon almost every shop was lighted up) it was exaggerated into a great red blaze, with a rim round it that baffled speculation, and filled the eyes with unintelligible shapes flickering in the dim and greasy twilight. The lamp-posts puzzled you with a series of grotesque deceptions. Sometimes they seemed miles off, then all of a sudden you struck against one of them. Sometimes they palpitated in the murky air; sometimes they ran up into the sky, as if they had the tenuity of a wire, and were undergoing a process of stretching; and sometimes they shrunk down before you and vanished into the earth. Under any circumstances you would never have taken them for lamp-posts, and it was only when you felt the thick dew upon the cold iron, and assured yourself of their identity by the help of a foregone conclusion, that the fact became evident to your reason rather than your senses. It was one of those mornings that very often occur in London, and never anywhere else: one of those mornings that foreigners never can comprehend from description, and that Englishmen are equally at a loss to describe. The fog was swaying backwards and forwards against the windows of the houses, and darkening the interiors so effectually that the inhabitants were obliged to breakfast by candlelight. It was worse than the absolute darkness of midnight, for it did not allow fair play to

the rays of lamps or candles, catching them up, and flinging them about in a manner so lurid and fantastic as to produce the most bewildering confusion in corners and shadowy places. Under the influence of this dreary, tantalising fog, two gentlemen sat at a table covered with the wrecks of eggs and other *débris* of a bachelor's breakfast, with a pair of candles between them that threw out into strong relief, somewhat like a picture of Schalken's, the anxious expression of their faces. One of them was Henry Winston, and the other was his friend and adviser, Mr. Michael Costigan.

Mr. Costigan was evidently rather put out by the information Henry Winston had just communicated to him. Winston, breaking through all bounds of prudence and etiquette, and acting on the mad impulse of the moment, had effectually done that which Costigan had advised him all along carefully to avoid, and had thereby placed himself in the wrong. Nothing would have been easier, according to Costigan, than to have thrown the *onus* on Lord Charles, so that he should have been made answerable for any consequences that might have ensued. Costigan clearly looked upon duelling as one of the Fine Arts, in which enthusiasm was an excellent ingredient when it was governed by strictly scientific principles; and being perfectly cool and dispassionate in all affairs of that kind himself, he was not disposed to make much allowance for hasty errors or want of tact in others.

"You have committed an egregious blunder, my young fellow," he cried; "an unpardonable blunder. Nothing can satisfy a blow but a shot. You must fight him."

"I know it," replied Winston.

"It's just as well, since it must be so, that you go into it with a good heart; and it'll be a comfort for you to feel that there isn't a man in the three kingdoms can humbug Mick Costigan in a business of the sort. I'll put you up to two or three secrets; but mind, once I take it into my own hands, you've nothing more to say to it. The principal's nobody—it's the second that has the responsibility upon his shoulders. Mind that."

"I am aware of it," returned Winston; "but before we go any farther, I should like to know what you intend to do."

"What I intend to do? Now, what is it to you what I intend to do? Mind your own business, and just leave me to mine."

"That's all very well," said Henry, reddening, and showing

symptoms of impatience at the mystery of high art in which Costigan was indulging; "but as I have some little interest in the result, I am entitled to know beforehand how you mean to proceed."

"For what reason, will you tell me? Do you think I'm so ignorant of my office that it's necessary for me to consult you? Because if you do, the sooner I throw it up the better, and the best thing you can do is to be your own second. What would you think of that now, by way of variety?"

"No—no, I don't mean that."

"Then what *do* you mean? I'd advise you to be quick, for it's past twelve, and unless his lordship is going to show the white feather, you may expect to hear from him immediately."

"What I mean is this," returned Winston, "that if you are to act for me, you must understand my feelings. I will consent to no apology, Costigan. Let what may happen, I will never make an apology to that man."

"And who's asking you? Apology? Whoo! Mick Costigan make an apology? If it wasn't for the circumstances you're in, and that I've a regard for you, I'd take it as a personal insult to suspect me of making an apology. Did you ever hear of a man whistling jigs to a milestone? Upon my honour, Mr. Winston, it would be just as profitable an occupation as trying to wheedle an apology out of Mick Costigan."

"Well—I am satisfied—and for the rest, I put myself in your hands. What are we to do?"

"Nothing. Keep yourself quiet, that's all you've got to do; and when his lordship's friend calls upon you, don't enter into any particulars at all, but refer him to me. Let him appoint his own time and place, and I'll do myself the pleasure of waiting upon him. And mind, there must be no delay. Half an hour from the time he leaves you I'll be with him. Was that a knock?"

Henry Winston ran to the window, and looked down through the yellow-brown fog, but could distinguish nothing in the street below.

"It was somebody," he exclaimed; "they have opened the door."

"Asy, asy," cried Costigan; "just throw yourself on the sofa, and take up a book. Hem! Come in. Ri-tol-lol-de-rol."

There was a gentle tap at the door, and presently Mrs.

Stubbs entered with a card. It would be difficult to say whether she suspected anything, or whether she thought the card was charged with gunpowder, for at all times she had a knowing and inquiring look that suggested the notion of sinister curiosity; but upon this occasion it was rather more marked and penetrating than usual, as she handed the card to Henry Winston, and alternately glanced rapidly from him to Mr. Costigan. Henry Winston pushed the card across the table to his friend.

"You'll see him, of course," observed Costigan, humming an air through his teeth with an appearance of indifference that considerably perplexed the speculations of Mrs. Stubbs.

"Show the gentleman up," said Henry Winston.

"Colonel Mercer Beauchamp," cried Costigan, reading the name on the card. "He's a military man. All right. I'll slip into the next room. He mustn't see me, you know," and he glided into the bedroom; but before he closed the door he popped out his head, and added, "Just give me a brevet, for the look of the thing—call me Captain Costigan."

At the same moment that the one door was precipitately closed, the other slowly opened, and a middle-sized austere man, with a strong cast of authority and discipline in his manner and bearing, advanced into the room.

"Have I the honour of addressing Mr. Winston?" he inquired.

"That is my name," returned Henry. "I beg you will be seated."

"I come to you upon rather a disagreeable business, Mr. Winston," observed Colonel Beauchamp, "on the part of my friend, Lord Charles Eton."

"I am ready to hear you, sir."

There was a slight pause, just long enough to afford time for a click of the handle of the bedroom door to be heard, Mr. Costigan being engaged at the instant in endeavouring to keep it a hair's breadth ajar that he might the better overhear the conversation.

"We are alone?" inquired the colonel.

"Certainly," returned Winston.

"I presume it is hardly necessary, Mr. Winston, to require a guarantee from you that you will not take advantage of any communication I may have to make from Lord Charles Eton."

"Advantage!"

"That is, that you will consider the communication as one which is understood to be privileged amongst gentlemen."

"Oh! I understand. Whatever communication you have to make, sir, will be perfectly safe."

"That is enough," replied Colonel Beauchamp, settling himself in his chair, and for the first time looking round the room, which, although he betrayed no ill-bred surprise at its somewhat miscellaneous and disorderly furniture, evidently struck him as an odd sort of residence for a gentleman to whom Lord Charles Eton found it necessary to send a hostile message.

"I am opposed to duelling, Mr. Winston," said the colonel, "on principle; and, although I belong to the old school which encouraged the practice, I was one of those who approved of the standing orders by which it is prohibited in the two services. Therefore, whenever my duty to a friend calls upon me to interfere in matters of this kind, my object is to effect an amicable settlement—if possible."

"The feeling is creditable to you, Colonel Beauchamp."

"You must not give me credit for it as a matter of feeling, but as a matter of reason. A duel, sir, is bad logic. It proves nothing, and only increases the difficulty of getting at a right understanding in such unfortunate affairs as the present."

"May I ask to what purpose you direct these remarks, sir?"

"My purpose, I think, is pretty clear," returned Colonel Beauchamp, half-closing his eyes in a peculiar manner, and directing their focal rays, with some severity of expression, full upon Henry Winston's face. "You appear to have forgotten yourself in a moment of excitement last night, and to have committed an act of violence upon my friend Lord Charles Eton, who is perfectly unconscious of having given you the slightest provocation."

"I will not enter into that question with you, sir," replied Winston.

"Bravo!" whispered Costigan to himself behind the door.

"Assuming the circumstances to be exactly as you have stated them," continued Winston, "what does Lord Charles Eton demand?"

"Demand?" echoed the colonel; "no—no—we must not put it in that shape. My friend might have had recourse to a tribunal of a different kind; and I must say, considering his position, and the absence of provocation, he would have been

justified in doing so ; but he is too sensitive and high-minded to avail himself of such a remedy."

"Sensitive and high-minded !" exclaimed Henry Winston, in a tone of derision ; "pray go on, sir."

"I rely on your own good sense," resumed the colonel, taking no notice of the exclamation, and speaking with a composure of manner that formed a striking contrast to the impatience that was mounting into Henry Winston's cheeks ; "I rely on your own good sense for the removal of any difficulties in the way of a friendly adjustment of this affair. You are both very young men—very hot, as all young men are ; and things are often done in heat which an honourable man is glad of an opportunity of recalling in his cooler moments."

"Sir," returned Henry Winston, "I have nothing to recall ; and I must take the liberty of observing that I do not think your mode of proceeding is calculated to lead to a friendly adjustment."

"I am sorry you think so," replied the colonel, in a voice of grave irony.

"But I will not discuss the matter with you. You must deal with it in your own way ; and it will save time and trouble, Colonel Beauchamp, if you will come to the point at once."

Costigan, who was getting rather out of humour with the conversation, here nodded his head to himself, as much as to say, "Good !"

"You are surely not indisposed to admit," said the colonel, softening his voice slightly, "that Lord Charles is entitled to *some* concession from you for the indignity you put upon him ?"

"I admit nothing—I retract nothing. Now, sir, the course is clear. What is the object of your visit ?"

At this interrogatory, Costigan exhibited so lively a satisfaction, that he nearly betrayed his hiding-place.

"Am I to understand that you refuse to make any reparation for the insult you inflicted upon my friend ?" demanded the colonel.

"What reparation does he require ?"

"The reparation is obvious enough—submission to terms, or——"

"Or ?"

"The satisfaction of a gentleman !"

"I accept the alternative without the least hesitation. He

shall have the satisfaction he seeks. Nothing more, I apprehend, remains to be done but to refer you to my friend. If you will be good enough to make an appointment, he will wait upon you in half an hour."

"I like your promptitude and decision. When a man is in a quarrel, the more speedily he carries it through the better; and now that we understand each other, you shall find no impediment or delay on my side. There—I have written the appointment on my card—'Junior United Service Club—at half-past one o'clock precisely.'"

"You will find us punctual, Colonel Beauchamp."

"What a confounded fog it is. I hope it will clear up for both our sakes within the next four-and-twenty hours."

"I hope so too."

An ambiguous smile, with the ghastly light of the candles making it show somewhat painfully, passed between them, as Henry Winston saw his visitor to the door, and Colonel Beauchamp, after a ceremonious "Good morning!" made the best of his way down the dark and inconvenient stairs. The moment he was gone, Costigan bounded into the room.

"Capital, my boy! Faith! I couldn't have done it better myself. That fellow's up to his business. He wanted to jockey you, but you weren't to be done. After all, I like to have a fellow to deal with that knows what he's about, and once he and I come together, we'll settle the matter in a twinkling. Now, my darlin' fellow, you've nothing to do, but just to write a letter home. In such cases I always like to provide for the worst. You needn't bother yourself, I suppose, to make a will, for I dare say you're not troubled with much property to leave behind you?"

Henry Winston's face blanched for a moment, but the colour quickly returned again. He now really felt himself face to face with the retribution for which his spirit had so impatiently panted; and now, for the first time, the thought of those dear friends whose life was folded up in his, and the heavy sorrow that would fall upon them should any fatal chance happen to him, presented itself to his mind. Hitherto but the one object was constantly before him—and in contemplating that, the quiet Wren's Nest, into which no turbulent passions entered, where all was peace and kindness and simplicity of heart,—the old man, who still looked out, through his daily paper, with unruffled tranquillity upon the feverish struggles of the world; the careful mother, who had

watched over his wayward youth with an affection that was never weary of its round of infinitesimal tenderness; the gentle sister, who loved him so fondly, all had been swept away in the torrent of maddening feelings that raged in his bosom. And now they all rose up before him in their sweetness and purity, in their unchanging devotion and household truth—clinging to every fibre of his heart, and beseeching him to stay his purpose. But it was too late. The die was cast. It was not a time to look back upon his home, which he was, perhaps, about to desolate for ever, except to look back to utter, it might be, his last farewell.

"Will?" returned Henry, rallying himself into as cheerful a voice as he could,—“will? No—no—Costigan, I have nothing to leave but idle words of miserable comfort. I will write a few letters while you are away.”

"A few letters?" responded Costigan, putting his hand encouragingly on his shoulder; "now take an ould boy's advice, that has seen more business of this kind than you're ever likely to see if you were to live to the age of Methusalem. The less you write the better. Don't dwell on it. One little note to your mother, just to say that it was forced on you, and you couldn't help it, will be quite enough. Throw it off at once, and don't let it be on your spirits. Writin' long mournful epistles, that may never be wanted after all, only tries a man's nerves, and you'll want all the nerves you have by-and-by with a blessin'!"

"You are right—a few hasty words will be best."

"Besides, my dear fellow, I was born under a lucky star. The sorrow a harm will come to you. Take my word for that. I never lost a man yet, but three, and they were easily accounted for by reason of accidents that'll happen in the best regulated families. So take heart, Harry Winston; scribble a little bit of a note to your mother, and I'll be back with you in a jiffy, after I take the measure of the colonel. A straight eye, and a steady hand, and if you don't leave your mark upon him, I'm a pinkeen—that's all. Whoo!" And pitching his hat upon his head with an indescribable leer of hilarity, Mr. Michael Costigan darted out of the room.

Our London fogs sometimes clear off about noon, or a little later in the day; but on this occasion the fog was unusually perverse, and got darker and darker as the day advanced, as if there was not enough of gloom in the thoughts of Henry Winston, but that it must be deepened by external influences.

The candles emitted a peculiarly sallow flame that struggled out by sheer force into the mist that consumed it. The space under the table and round the table was involved in shadowy darkness, and the whole aspect of the room was such as might have made even a merry man feel uncomfortable. After a few turns up and down, Henry Winston pushed away some of the breakfast things to make room for a little travelling writing-case, and having adjusted his materials, took up his pen to accomplish his task. He hesitated for a long time before he began. He did not know how to begin. He was afraid of alarming his mother all at once—he wanted to break the news to her gradually. But how was that to be done? “My dearest mother,”—“my beloved mother,”—“my own darling mother,” and other like affectionate phrases passed through his mind, bringing with them throngs of images and memories that came too confusedly to allow him to shape into words the feelings that agitated him. He felt that he was writing from the threshold of another world. This letter was to be delivered when he was dead. That was its object—with that view it was to be written. Where was he to find adequate expression to atone for the great affliction he was about to cast upon the tenderest and most loving of all human beings—he who had so recently been indebted to her comforting and watchful care for recovery from a long illness, who had received her pious benediction at parting, and who was now about to return all her patient devotion by the cruellest blow that could fall on a mother’s heart. He felt that it would kill her. Sheet after sheet was blotted and cast away, and if some tears fell upon them, who shall say that it was a stain upon his manhood?

Leaving Henry Winston to fulfil, as best he may, the melancholy duty imposed upon him, we must now follow Mr. Michael Costigan to the Junior United Service Club, in the hall of which establishment he presented himself punctually at the half hour.

Mr. Costigan had unluckily forgotten his card-case, a circumstance which he was particularly careful to impress upon the porter, and having asked for a slip of paper, he wrote upon it, in a bold and heroic hand, “Captain Costigan,” and sent it in to Colonel Beauchamp. Now Costigan was not a captain in the United Service sense of the word; but he was a captain metaphorically speaking, and felt himself justified in taking up the title whenever it was likely to be useful to him.

The fact was, he had been gazetted many years before in a corps of *bon-vivants* that once flourished in the Irish metropolis under the name of the Horse-Marines. He was a captain of Horse-Marines, and had worn their uniform, which consisted of a long naval coat with military buttons and sash, dragoon boots, a cocked hat, and a tin sword at least three yards long. No man was admitted into this corps under the rank of captain. It was a highly disciplined body, and did duty in gallant style once a fortnight over a capital dinner. The fortune of war had thinned its ranks, year after year, from one cause or another, such as death, marriage, bankruptcy, and expatriation; and the Horse-Marines were finally disbanded. But the glory of their achievements, and the memory of the honours they had conferred, lingered with the few wandering members that yet survived. As Costigan frequently remarked, it was a proud event in a man's life to have been a Horse-Marine.

Colonel Beauchamp was alone in a small ante-room when Costigan was introduced to his presence. The colonel had seen a great many captains in his time, and knew that the class was as full of varieties as the leaves of a wood; but he had never before seen such a captain as Costigan, nor until that gentleman actually stood before him with his attire flying off, and his hirsute face swollen with vivacity of rather a savage cast, could he have made to himself the image of such a captain. The contrast between the two individuals who were thus brought together to conduct an affair of honour to its perilous issue was certainly very striking. The sallow, rigorous visage of the colonel, his erect figure, and that unmistakeable notion which he at once gave you of the martinet, with a strong dash of the aristocrat, in his bearing, offered the most complete opposition to the utterly chaotic aspect of Mr. Michael Costigan, who looked the express image of a man independent of discipline of every kind, mental or military, and who, in his thoughts and actions, as in his costume, set all order and conformity to established usages at defiance. And in the hands of these widely dissimilar, and, in different ways, equally incompetent, persons the decision of a question of life and death was now irrevocably vested.

"Captain Costigan, I believe?" said the colonel, examining the person of his visitor with a searching and rapid scrutiny, and placing a significant emphasis on the word *captain*, as if

he distrusted his right to the title, or suspected that he must have come by it in some illegitimate way.

"That's my name, sir. You expected a gentleman at half-past one to call upon you on the part of Mr. Henry Winston. Clocks differ, but, upon an average, I b'lieve it's the half hour to the minute."

"I am glad Mr. Winston has selected a gentleman of my own cloth to act for him, captain," observed the colonel, in the hope of extracting from Costigan some intimation of his position in the service. But the bait failed.

"You make me proud, sir," returned Costigan; "and before we've done with this little affair, I flatter myself you'll be of opinion that my friend might have committed a greater blunder than intrusting his honour to my discretion. It's not the first affair of the sort I've been engaged in, colonel, and I must remark that I never found the least difficulty in coming to a satisfactory arrangement when I had a military man of experience, like yourself, to deal with. It's brats of boys and novices, that don't know the smell of gunpowder from the whiff of a cigar, that brings duelling into disgrace. Don't you agree with me?"

"Entirely."

"Then let us go to business at once. We haven't much time before us to-day, and it's cruel bad light, and the sooner we settle the preliminaries the better."

"I am glad to hear you say, Captain Costigan," returned the colonel, opposing a remarkably quiet and chilling tone of voice to the impetuous address of the other, "that you never had any difficulty in coming to a satisfactory arrangement with military men. I trust you will not find me an exception to your general experience. As a proof of it, I am quite willing to waive the ulterior right which Mr. Winston's reference to a friend has given me, and to receive any proposition you may be prepared to make."

"Proposition? Me make a proposition? I'm afraid, colonel, we don't understand each other exactly. Wouldn't it be just as well for us to clear the ground as we go on, so as to prevent any mistakes between you and me, you know," replied Costigan, laying a significant stress on the last few words.

"By all means," said the colonel, who saw precisely the sort of man he had to do with, and that the slightest attempt to take advantage of him, or cajole him, might convert his own

position from that of a second to a principal. "By all means. You are aware, in the first instance, I presume, of all the circumstances of the case?"

"Of course I am."

"And I take it for granted, Captain Costigan, that you are fully empowered to carry the matter through?"

"Now, don't you think you're wasting a great deal of time?" cried Costigan. "The business is placed in our hands—that's enough. Go on—it's getting darker every minute; and, if you don't make haste, we'll lose the day. And remember, Colonel Beauchamp, that if any accident happens between the cup and the lip—you understand me—it's no fault of mine."

"I hope I am not throwing any unnecessary impediment in the way, captain," replied the colonel; "I am only anxious to do my duty strictly for the honour of the cloth which we both wear."

"Well, do your duty, and leave the honour of the cloth to take care of itself. It'll be pitch dark before we're done."

"It appears to me," observed the colonel, pressing his chin meditatively between his forefinger and thumb, "that this quarrel between two young men is one of those affairs in which we ought to try—it is not for me to say that such a thing is possible—but that we ought to try to bring about an arrangement. What's your opinion, Captain Costigan?"

"Do you mean a *pa-cific* arrangement?" inquired Costigan, submitting his chin to a similar process, in imitation of the colonel.

"Well—yes—if you can suggest——"

"Why, if you're anxious to retract your demands on Mr. Winston," returned Costigan, "I don't think I'd stand in the way; only in that case there'd be a trifling apology due to me for giving me the trouble of coming here for nothing. Is that what you're at?"

"Retract, sir? I see I must speak by the card with you, Captain Costigan; and having indicated to you that I am open to a proposal, I have nothing more to say than that my friend has suffered an humiliating indignity, and looks for the redress to which he is entitled."

"That's plain English, at last," returned Costigan; "and, putting it in that clear, unmistakeable, and gentlemanly shape, there's no reason in the world why we shouldn't immediately come to a friendly adjustment of our differences."

There's not another word necessary but to name time and place."

"Before you do so, I am bound to remind you, that if you force me to the ground, I can no longer listen to terms which at present I might be disposed to accept. The responsibility, therefore, of that step must rest with you."

"I perceive, colonel," replied Costigan, with a humorous shake of his head, "you're an ould bird. No matter—you shall have it your own way; and as you're so mighty particular about responsibility, if it's the least gratification in life to you, I'll take it entirely upon myself. One word for all. We come here to fight, not to talk. We have no terms to offer, and what's more than that—now you've put it plainly to me—we won't be let off. What o'clock is it?"

"A quarter past two."

"The days are gettin' short. What sort of light is there at five?"

"I should certainly say dangerous; but I'd rather not give an opinion. Take your own course. To-day, if you please."

"It's a murderin' light," said Costigan, looking out of the window, "I suppose we must wait till to-morrow morning."

"I should myself prefer to have it over at once," returned the colonel; "but I agree with you that the weather is against us; and the day falling in so early with such a fog—I think we should be hardly justified."

"That's just what I was thinking too. There's no fair play in such light as this. Suppose we say to-morrow morning, at eight o'clock?"

"Where?"

"Chalk Farm—at the foot of the hill, to the left."

"You will find us prepared."

"So far, colonel," said Costigan, taking up his hat, "you and I have agreed to a hair, and I've no doubt we'll part the best friends in the world to-morrow morning."

"There is no reason why we should have any hostility against each other, Captain Costigan."

"Not the least," replied Costigan; "if these foolish young men had got into less experienced hands, it's hard to say how it might have ended."

"Quite true."

"They're sure of being placed in the best possible position for the vindication of their honour."

"Yes—they're sure of that, at all events."

"And, whatever happens, we shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done our duty."

"I hope so."

"Then I wish you good evening," returned Costigan, with a glance into the street, which was now enveloped in darkness; "I wish you good evening, till eight o'clock to-morrow morning, and the compliments of the season to you, Colonel Beauchamp."

"Good evening, Captain Costigan," replied the colonel, bowing his visitor to the door.

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATIONS.

WHEN Mr. Farquhar arrived in Portman-square, Lord Charles Eton was closeted with his friend, the colonel, to whom he was relating the occurrence which had taken place at the Opera the evening before, carefully avoiding all reference to antecedent circumstances, and leaving it to appear that the outrage was wholly unprovoked.

In half an hour Colonel Beauchamp took his departure, and his lordship gave audience to Mr. Farquhar. Early as it was, Lord Charles was dressed for the day. He never appeared in a morning-gown to visitors; eschewing all those habits that have a look of luxury and indolence, and cultivating in the minutest trifles the reputation of a man engrossed in public affairs. Your butterfly fop, who steeps his poor carcase in ambrosia, is not more eaten up by affectations, than your hunter of a graver kind of popularity. Mr. Farquhar opened his business with his habitual calmness and discretion, contenting himself with observing that it was as much due to his lordship as to Mr. Rawlings that the matter should be satisfactorily explained.

Lord Charles Eton received this communication not merely without any appearance of surprise, but with an air of superciliousness, which might have dashed the confidence of a man of less fixed purpose than Mr. Farquhar.

"I really am at a loss to understand what Mr. Rawlings can possibly expect me to do in a matter that took place nearly a quarter of a century ago," said Lord Charles; "he is, of course, at liberty to offer any explanation he chooses.

but it is rather unreasonable that he should trouble me on the subject."

"Unreasonable, my lord?" rejoined Mr. Farquhar; "on the contrary, it appears to me the most reasonable of all things, that as you have cast a stigma upon him, he should look to you to assist him in tracing it to its source."

"Mr. Rawlings has become wonderfully sensitive to stigmas all of a sudden," returned the other. "If he is so eager to protect his reputation, why doesn't he relieve himself from the weightier charges that are publicly launched against him, instead of intruding upon my time about an obscure transaction of no importance to anybody?"

"I am sorry you take that view of the subject, for, slight as this matter may appear to your lordship, Mr. Rawlings looks at it in a very different light; and it must be judged by his feelings and not by yours. As to the other charges you speak of, I know nothing about them. My business is to ask an explanation of the grounds upon which you accused Mr. Rawlings, in the presence of several witnesses, of a breach of trust? I beg you will give me a direct answer."

"'Pon my word, Mr. Farquhar," replied Lord Charles, "I don't know that I *can* give you a direct answer. I have not the slightest intention of treating you personally with discourtesy—of that, I am sure, you will acquit me,—but really my attention is occupied by more urgent business."

"No business, my lord, can be more urgent," returned Mr. Farquhar, "than that of rendering back justice to those whom we have wronged. As you are in a hurry, I will not detain you a moment longer than is absolutely necessary to obtain the information I seek. I am satisfied you never would have made such an assertion unless you had some foundation for it. Now, what I want to know is, from whom did you derive your information?"

"In answer to that question, allow me to ask you another. Does Mr. Rawlings deny that his employer on his death-bed intrusted him with his confidence?"

"It is the subtle mixture of truth and falsehood, that renders these calumnies so specious and injurious. There *was* such a confidence, but as it involves the secret of another, he is unwilling to vindicate himself by disclosing it, and showing how honourably he has discharged his trust, unless he is driven to that extremity in self-defence. He is prepared, however, to do so, if you will not afford him the opportunity of

" " "

convicting his libeller, whoever he may be, by any other means."

"I beg at once, sir, to disclaim for myself any share in the origin of the story. I repeated it simply as it reached me."

"Yes; but if you shelter the calumniator, you assume the responsibility of the calumny."

"It seems to me," returned Lord Charles, "that you attach more importance to the matter than it is worth. However, if Mr. Rawlings chooses to exaggerate trifles, while he treats serious things with indifference, I shall certainly not offer any obstruction to his proceedings. All I know about the matter is very much at your service, only I must stipulate that I am not to be dragged into it any farther."

"We require no more, my lord, than to know who your informant is, and to be put in possession of the exact information you received."

"I have not the least objection to satisfy you as far as I can," replied Lord Charles, opening a drawer, and taking out a number of letters; "but as to exact information—the particulars, if I ever had any, have entirely escaped me, and I must refer you, in short, to the person who mentioned the circumstance to me. That's the only way I can help you."

"That will be quite sufficient."

"I'll find his name for you in a moment," continued the other, turning over the letters, and running through them hastily. "Let me see—here it is—Pogey—that's it—Pogey—I know very little about him myself, but I dare say Mr. Rawlings can enlighten you. He is a Yarlton man, and came to me with an introduction which justified me in supposing him to be a respectable person. The best thing you can do is to call upon him—I have no doubt he will repeat the story to you verbatim."

"Where does he live?"

"I have got his address here somewhere—what is it?—6 or 16, Northumberland-court, Strand."

Mr. Farquhar wrote down the address.

"The next time I see your lordship, I hope it will be to satisfy you that Mr. Rawlings has been maligned by this person. That is the only farther trouble I shall give you in the matter. I trust Lady Charles is better this morning? She was not looking quite so well as usual last night."

"Thank you—she is suffering from a nervous headache. I think Miss Rawlings is with her."

“Indeed!” returned Mr. Farquhar; “then I will venture to send in my name.”

As Lord Charles intimated, Margaret and Clara were together in the boudoir. He had little suspicion of the cause that led to their meeting at that early hour.

The interview with Henry Winston, and the extraordinary disclosure he made to her, had condemned Margaret to a night of anguish. Her heart was wrung with a conflict of wild emotions. She had hitherto tried to forget Henry Winston; and if she had not succeeded in forgetting him, she had, at least, wrestled faithfully with a feeling which it was madness and disloyalty to acknowledge even to herself. She had believed that if they were to meet again she was safe; that she could encounter his eyes without trepidation; that the influence he once exercised over her could never be revived again; and this belief was a victory in itself. But she had not calculated on the latent force of love. It was all well while doubt and obscurity hung over the incident of their separation—all well, while she mistrusted his truth, and found an escape for her wounded pride in new ties and duties. In one brief moment the delusion was dispelled. She had seen him again—she had seen the same earnest and passionate devotion in his eyes—she had heard him speak in the same tones of overwhelming despair which, in the last troubled hours of their intercourse, used to impart such touching melancholy to his voice—she had heard from his own lips that some terrible mystery had equally deceived them both—that he loved her still, if that thought might dare to utter itself in words—and she felt that she too,—but she struggled to refuse her conviction to it, and sought refuge from its dark suggestions in the strength of a greater misery.

The conduct of Lord Charles on his return with her from the Opera might, under these circumstances, have created some alarming apprehensions in her mind, but that she ascribed his sullen fierceness to the scene which had previously taken place in Park-lane. The high breeding which cast such suavity of exterior over his bearing abroad, was dropped when he was alone with Margaret, and left him at his ease to indulge in the undress of a grim silence. But that night he was morose, although he spoke little. It was easy to see that he was moved by some unusual excitement; although it never occurred to Margaret that Henry Winston could be in any way concerned in it. The first thing she did in the morning

was to despatch a note to Clara, summoning her in haste to come to her.

Margaret's wild and flurried looks betrayed her secret almost before she uttered it.

"I have seen him, Clara!"

"Henry Winston?"

"At the Opera last night. He came into my box. I was alone. Oh! Clara, Clara, what has happened? What is this terrible thing he tells me? It would be all well—as nothing to me—if my heart did not tell me that by some dreadful mischance I have wronged him, and that he is suffering for it. There is my remorse—it is for him, not for myself. All feeling for myself is dead—dead—dead!"

Margaret had covered her face with her hands while she was speaking the last few broken words, and did not at first perceive the change that had suddenly passed over the features of Clara. A ghastly paleness overspread her face. She saw in an instant that the secret—which out of mercy to her sister she hoped might never transpire—had been discovered, and divulged to her in the worst form of suspicion and reproach. Bitter remorse was in her soul, and when she tried to speak her voice failed.

"What is this, Clara?" continued Margaret; "for God's sake, speak to me. I remember there was something weighing heavily on your mind, and you charged me not to ask you any questions. And I did not—I was silent, though my heart was breaking. But all that has passed away, and now there is no longer any reason why you should make a mystery with me about Henry Winston."

"Margaret," replied Clara, clasping her hands passionately, and looking into her face with an expression of great mental agony, "I never, of my own will, had a concealment from you in my life. Your happiness was mine from childhood. You know it—you believe it in your heart."

"I do—I do."

"You cannot believe that I would have willingly hidden anything from you? No—no—no!"

"What am I to say, or think, Clara? There *was* a concealment—why was it? Henry Winston gave you a letter. You never told me of it. You knew the contents of that letter, and never revealed them to me. You must have had some reason, or you never would have doomed me to the wretchedness you knew I was suffering—the worse than

wretchedness, the sin of a marriage without love, or hope, which has blighted his life and mine."

"Spare me, for mercy's sake, these cruel words. It is true—it is true, Margaret," she added, in a low voice; "I did conceal that letter from you. He has told you of it, and I am absolved so far. God help me! How gladly I should have told you everything, and warned you if I had dared. But I was bound, Margaret,—I shudder when I think of it—bound by an oath."

"An oath!"

"Do you recollect the morning you drove out with my father and Lord Charles?"

"Oh, yes, dear Clara; go on."

"Do you remember how I tried to persuade you not to go?"

"And you knew then that he was waiting for me?"

"I did."

"It is dark and incredible. Did you know that we were to drive past the spot where he was expecting me?"

"I suspected it; and that was the reason why I wanted you not to go."

"There is still a mystery in this, Clara, and I have a right to have it cleared up. Think well, before you answer me; think whether there is any obligation upon you strong enough to justify you in heaping more misery on me than I can bear. Do not make me desperate, Clara. We have wronged him to whom my early affections were pledged, and for whose sake I would then have cheerfully encountered poverty and toil, a thousand times over, rather than have deceived or wounded him for one moment. His heart is broken. It is a heavy thought to me, guiltless as I am of having brought it on him. I say this to you because you are my sister, and because I have always confided my inmost feelings to you. I would not confess it to any other human being—not to *him*, for the wealth of the world! Think before you answer me. You say you suspected that they would drive me to the place where he was waiting for me, as if they had some horrid purpose in it. What made you suspect that?"

"Because," replied Clara, slowly, her lips turning white, and trembling as she spoke—"because my father knew he was waiting there."

"Merciful heavens!" exclaimed Margaret; "I see it all now. My father intercepted the letter?"

"He did."

"And made you swear, Clara?—imposed an oath upon you?"

Clara waved her head to and fro, but made no answer.

"That my father should have done this! May God forgive him!" cried Margaret, uttering a bitter groan. "I hardly know," she continued, after a pause, "whether it is better that this knowledge should have thus come to me, or been hidden from me for ever. It is well, at all events, that *he* should know I was ignorant of everything, and unconscious of the great crime I was committing. It will be some solace to him—a poor consolation for a life of unavailing sorrow. But we must never meet in this world again."

"Had I supposed," said Clara, still speaking in a voice almost inarticulate, "that there was any likelihood of your ever meeting Henry Winston, I should have broken this to you in some way after your marriage, Margaret; but I thought all along I acted rightly in concealing it. I thought I should have done wrong to have embittered your existence with a regret so poignant and so useless. But it preyed bitterly on my spirit, and I believe I never should have known happiness to the end of my life till I had confessed it."

"I am sure you did all for the best:—my poor Clara!"

"And besides, dear Margaret," continued Clara, going on quietly with her confession, "I had great misgivings about him. I expected, at first, from day to day, that he would write to me, or find some means of communicating with you. But as time passed away, I began to waver about him, and wonder what had happened; and then doubts of his truth came upon me, and I tried at last to persuade myself that he was not worthy of you; and in that sophistry I lived. It was all that was left to me to stifle my remorse."

During these explanations Margaret was pacing up and down the room. The misery she was undergoing was legible in her ashy face, and the convulsive action with which at intervals she wrung her hands. A silence ensued, which neither of them seemed disposed to break. What could either of them say to lighten or alleviate the grief that was equally afflicting to both. At length Margaret, stopping opposite to Clara, resumed the conversation.

"You remember that letter of Rose Winston's."

"Yes."

"We can understand it now. When he saw me that morning in the carriage with Lord Charles, he believed that I had

yielded to my father's commands—that I was false—so soon, too! It was natural enough—it looked like it—though he ought to have known me better. Yet what could he think? It was a devilish act to take me there. Rose heard all this from him—how she must have hated me!”

“We should undeceive her. You ought to write, and explain it to her.”

“Explain it to her? What can it avail either of us to explain it now? I am very wretched, Clara. May God strengthen me through this trial, for I feel it almost too hard to bear!”

“You must not talk in that way, Margaret. There are many consolations, I hope, yet in store for you. We must trust to time to heal these wounds. Remember that he is young; and as he grows older, and mixes more with the world, he will, probably, marry; and then——”

“And then, Clara? I am married—he, too, may marry as I have done. Will that help us to forget?”

“Perhaps, Margaret, your sensibility has exaggerated the state of his feelings.”

“Ah! how gladly should I take that comfort to myself, if I dare. It would be the happiest news you could bring me, Clara, that he had thrown off all memory of me—that he loved another. I think, could I be assured of that, I should be happy—happy! But that last wretched resource is denied to me. He looks wretchedly ill—the change that has taken place in him is frightful—he did not complain—all he sought was an explanation, to which I little thought he was so well entitled; but he said his life was miserable. He need not have said so—my own heart felt it before he spoke!”

“What did you say to him?”

“What could I say? I told him that we were separated for ever; that I would not listen to him; that he must leave me. Words, of course. He knew how false they were!”

“Well? He respected your position, and left you?”

“He did. He left me. That is the point, Clara. You do not feel it—you cannot. Henry Winston loves me. If he did not love me, he would have acted differently. He fled from me in terror, and prayed of me, if I should ever think of him after that night, to think kindly of him! Think kindly of him! Clara, I have but one wish to fulfil towards him, and I ask you, by your love for me, to execute it. Will you promise me?”

“What is it, Margaret?”

“I must never see Henry Winston again. I am the wife of

Lord Charles Eton. If I can be nothing more to him, I will at least act in that relation with integrity. I swear this! I pledge myself before God that, racked as I am with many dreadful thoughts, by a grief that no words can express, I will discharge my duties as a wife, so that not a stain shall fall upon me. But, for Henry Winston, let there be seas and continents between him and me. We must not live in the same land. We must know nothing of each other from this time forth. For my sake he must do this; and if he does not, I will. But I trust all to his generosity, to his love—as I used to do. I would rather owe that obligation to him—it would be something to soften my fate hereafter, to know that he, after the wrong I have done, had made this sacrifice for my repose. You understand me, Clara?"

"I think I do."

"It is only just that he should learn how all this happened, and that he should have it from you."

"From me, Margaret?"

"He supposes that you suppressed the letter. My wish is, that you should explain everything to him. You may see him, though I must not: tell him exactly how it occurred; but he must not think—it would be little happiness to him to think that I regard him otherwise than as a stranger. That is all that he can ever be to me; and if he will consult my last injunction, tell him he must go away far from hence—that we must never meet; that if he will do this, he shall have my respect—my prayers for his welfare and happiness!"

"Margaret, I dare not do it."

"You refuse me, Clara?"

"My father bound me never to be the medium of any communication between you and Henry Winston. Show me how I can escape that obligation, and there is nothing you may not command me to do."

"Is such a pledge binding now, Clara? My father has no longer any control over my actions."

"But he has over mine. It is less of that I am thinking than of you. Consider your own situation. Suppose this reached my father. How can we tell what it might lead to, in the hostility that exists between him and Lord Charles?"

Margaret was stunned and hurt by the view Clara took of the subject. She had calculated confidently on her compliance; and felt as if it were due to herself as some reparation for the misery of which Clara had been made the instrument. She

thought, too, that her marriage ought to be a sufficient argument with Clara to absolve her from her oath. Was that pledge, so unnatural in itself, to impend over them for ever, and, at a moment like this, to alienate her sister from her? Making no reply, she turned away, and took a seat in silence in the window.

Clara saw that she was pained, and was about to speak, when Mr. Farquhar's name was announced. This unexpected interruption was, perhaps, the best thing that could have occurred. It broke off the conversation at a point where it had become deeply distressing to them both, and forced them to make an exertion to control their feelings. At the name of Mr. Farquhar, Clara faintly brightened up. She paused for an instant as if some sudden thought had struck her; and then going up hastily to her sister, she kissed her forehead, and seizing both her hands, while her eyes were filled with tears, she said, "Margaret—my own sweet, suffering sister—something has occurred to me. I will not tell you now what it is. I think I see, I am sure I do, how we can manage this, without compromising you, or me, or anybody. It is right that Henry Winston should be relieved by a full explanation, and, above all, that your wishes should be conveyed to him. I feel that as strongly as you do—perhaps am even more anxious about it, because I am the cause of all the sorrow that has fallen on you both. Cheer up, dear Margaret. I see how we can do it—and I promise you it shall be done. There—there—my own, own Margaret! Your poor Clara can never know happiness again unless she sees you smile, and love her as you used to do!"

The transition from the harrowing disclosures which had taken place between the sisters, to the happy news Mr. Farquhar had to communicate, acted like an electric shock upon Clara's nerves. Our whole existence is duplex—light and shadow, for ever flitting and falling about us, dooming mind and brain to fluctuations of joy and sorrow that wear them out at last!

The interview was short, and, so far as Mr. Farquhar was concerned, much restrained in its gaiety by his consideration for Lady Charles. It was when he was gone, taking Clara with him, that he gave full vent to his joy; for Mr. Farquhar, although he was so staid and reserved before third parties, was as light-hearted with his mistress as other men.

And when they were gone, poor Margaret, left again to

her solitude, after witnessing the dawn of that married happiness which was extinguished upon earth for her, felt more deeply than before the bitterness of the cup of life, and wept in her loneliness, and prayed for resignation!

CHAPTER IV

CHALK FARM.

HAVING made the necessary arrangements for the next day's business, Mr. Costigan took up his quarters in Henry Winston's lodgings for the night, to ensure punctuality, and avoid the suspicion that would be excited by knocking up the house at an unseasonable hour in the morning. Making Winston go to bed early, and telling him he should call him at half-past five, he proceeded to examine the condition of his hair-triggers, and inspect the contents of a stray decanter that stood invitingly on the side-table amongst a scattered array of glasses. In an hour or so all was quiet; save that Henry Winston, who still lay awake, was intermittently reminded of the proximity of his friend by certain hacking sounds that seemed as if Costigan were trying very hard to blow cracked penny trumpets in his sleep. At half-past five Costigan was in his room. It was pitch dark, and the candle he had lighted only made the gloom more palpable. The fog was still so heavy over the metropolis that the nearest lamp in the street could hardly be discerned, and looked as if it were miles off. They spoke together in whispers, and moved about noiselessly, scrambling for breakfast cups, and blundering over a coffee apparatus which had been left prepared for them over-night. Mr. Sloake and his son lay in the room above them, and Costigan was particularly anxious not to disturb them, for Sloake was just the sort of man, if he heard a stir in the house, to hurry down-stairs in his dressing-gown to see what it was about. At length the coffee was ready. There was no time for sitting-down, and so they snatched what they could standing and half-dressed, Costigan facetiously promising his friend that they would make a roaring breakfast when they returned.

"Now," said Costigan, when Winston's toilet was finished, "let me look at you. What's this?"

"Eh?" returned the other, not exactly comprehending him.

"Of course, I know it's a waistcoat. But did you ever see

a man fight a duel in a coloured waistcoat? Haven't you got such a thing as a black one?"

"To be sure."

"Then put it on. Do as I tell you, now, and don't talk. There, that's better. Now, just take off that tie, and get a long black handkerchief, and pin it down over your shirt."

Henry Winston was under orders, and implicitly obeyed them.

"Och! I've my own trouble with you. Take out that diamond pin—Hush! no noise—" he continued in a guarded undertone, "don't you see it'd catch the light, man alive! That's right. Stop, now, just turn in your collar. There musn't be a speck of white about you. Hould here a minute—open your coat, and let me put this belt round you;" and he proceeded to buckle a hunting belt round Winston's waist, fastening it so tightly that Winston winced under the operation. "Is that too tight for you?—try if you can breathe." It was as much as he could do.

Costigan now turned him round, and surveyed him carefully from head to foot. His eye fell upon Winston's boots.

"French polish!" he exclaimed, in a low growl; "have you taken leave of your senses, that you must stick your feet into a pair of looking-glasses? Do you wish to be hit? for, if you want to attract a bullet, you couldn't do it more complete. If you've got a pair of cloth boots in the world, put them on; or any ould pair that's dim and dirty, without a glimmer of polish on them, mind!"

These scientific instructions being strictly complied with, nothing more remained to be done, but to give Henry Winston a few hints as to how he was to manage himself on the ground.

"Put your watch in your right-hand pocket. Now, don't contradict me—it's all fair. A man has a right to wear his watch, I suppose, in any pocket he chooses, and I've known a watch before now turn off a bullet—a button, or anything will do it. Observe what I'm telling you. Before I place you on the ground, turn up the collar of your coat this way, and button it all round—slouch your hat so as to cover your ears—draw in your breath before you discharge your pistol, and make yourself as thin as you can. By this means, you'll be dark and slim from head to foot, and not a speck on you to catch his eye. That's a grand secret, my boy! Are you used to pistols?"

"Not much."

"Then all you've got to do is just to draw a line with your eye straight from your foot to his—and if you see any object on the ground—such as a tuft of grass, or a dark spot—let that be a mark to guide you—or a tree or a chimney, or anything at his back. Fire low—keep your elbow close to your side, and don't raise your hand higher than that."

As Costigan afterwards explained to Henry Winston, the object to be kept in view, when men, as in this case, really intended to fire at each other, was to hit the legs. If the shot took a higher range it was dangerous; and the inclination of the twentieth part of an inch would make all the difference between a scar for life and a death-wound. Henry Winston was perfectly cool and collected. He had dismissed from his mind all thoughts that were likely to interfere with the business on which he was engaged, and was more calm that morning than he had been at any time since the miserable day when he had last left London.

They stole out of the house before any of the inmates were up, and made their way to a carriage that was waiting for them at the corner of the Regent's circus, Henry Winston, enveloped in a large cloak, and Costigan carrying the case of pistols. Our experienced duellist had not provided a surgeon for the occasion, taking it for granted that his lordship would have professional assistance, and intending, if it was necessary, to avail himself of it. Besides, Mr. Costigan had a smattering of surgery himself, and, in case of extremity, could act as a *pis-aller*.

They started for Chalk Farm in a dense fog. A few gas-lamps, which were not yet extinguished by their attendant imps, still flared out here and there, on the sides of the road as they cleared the end of Mornington crescent, and began to feel the cold damp air of the country displacing the thick atmosphere of town. A solitary pedestrian, or a suburban fishmonger's light cart trundling home from Billingsgate, or a straggling group of workmen shuffling off to their day's labours, were the only incidents that relieved the dreary drive. Turning off the high-road at that point where a large signboard announces the vicinity of a tavern that bears the name of Chalk Farm, the carriage slowly and cautiously wound up a curving acclivity, and stopped short, under Costigan's directions, at a railway bridge which led to a piece of broken ground running up to the broad fields that stretch out their green expanse, at the foot of Primrose-hill. Some ten

or a dozen years, or more, had passed away since a duel had been fought in this locality, and in the intervening time, the place had undergone changes in the last degree unfavourable to the seclusion necessary for that once popular pastime. In former days, the country round Chalk Farm was wild and open; there was scarcely a house within sight: and, like the swamp at Battersea fields, it was so tempting in its remoteness, that a rifle club established their targets on the ground, in perfect confidence that, as far as their stray bullets could carry, there was not the slightest danger of grazing even a chance passenger. The scene was now materially altered. A great, sprawling railway station, with its numerous intersecting lines, electric wires, wagons and locomotive sheds and shops, occupied the space below which was formerly assigned to the longest range of the rifle shooting; and higher up, where the matches at shorter distances used to take place, the area was covered over and shut in with a low wall and a scrubby hedge, an American bowling-alley, and sundry tattered merry-go-rounds, affording evidence that the place which was once the haunt of skilful marksmen, and gentlemen who came hither in the grey of the morning to settle their disputes, was now the resort of the most beggarly class of holiday-makers.

All traces of the ancient solitude had disappeared. There stood the old Chalk Farm tavern, miserably poor and deserted, with its flight of crazy stairs, doing its best to look Swiss and summery, and, on the opposite side, its ragged tea-gardens, presenting ghastly imitations of the painted sentries and fire-work towers of old Vauxhall. Advancing through the line of dilapidated palisades by which the champaign that yawns round the base of the hill is enclosed, the busy and despoiling hand of change was no less visible. Rows of new houses at a distance, lofty chimneys starting up amongst the trees that fringed the horizon, and a sort of gymnasium, boarded round, and filled with swings, and climbing poles, and rotatory machines for making people's heads dizzy, caught the sight with a disturbing influence. The naked stillness of these wide meadows was gone for ever. Yet there was room enough on that extensive sward to find an unfrequented spot for Costigan's purpose; and as his practised eye ran over the scene, he noted its favourable points with rapidity.

Up the gentle slope to the summit of the hill, crossed at its foot by a beaten path, ran several small tracks, forming

light traces of infinite utility to a duellist who thoroughly understood the available advantages of his ground, and the art of placing his man. But the land-mark that chiefly attracted his attention was a tree, which, like Picton's tree on the plain of Waterloo (long since cut down), stood quite alone, and was the only visible object throughout the whole space that rose out of the dead level of the field. The worst of it was, this tree stood so close to the road (it stands there still), that the choice of such a position might be demurred to by the opposite party; but so few people were about, and, moreover, it was so dark, that Costigan hoped to overrule that objection.

They had not been many minutes on the ground when they discerned three figures at a distance beyond the palings. It was impossible to identify them; but they concluded at once that two of the group must be Lord Charles and his second, and were confirmed in this supposition by seeing one of the party retire before they entered the field. Advancing towards each other, a ceremonious recognition took place on both sides, and Colonel Beauchamp and Mr. Costigan withdrawing together, left their principals alone. They were within speaking distance, but they instinctively turned away, and walked in opposite directions, while their seconds were arranging the requisite preliminaries.

"Here's a good spot, colonel," said Costigan.

"Too close to the road," returned the colonel.

"Well, a little further on," said Costigan.

"Don't you think we had better get behind the hill on the other side?" said Beauchamp.

"The ground's uneven there. Depend on it, this is the best spot."

"Let me see—which way do you propose to place them?"

"I was thinking of that," replied Costigan, beginning to step the field in a direct line with the tree.

Colonel Beauchamp looked knowingly at him. "I object to the tree, Captain Costigan. Let us at least avoid unnecessary risk. Higher up we shall be less exposed. Which way is the wind?"

"In our faces as we stand."

"Then we had better take our ground across."

"All the same to me—equal main and chance," returned Costigan.

Moving towards the foot of the hill, farther away from the

houses, a tolerably screened level was selected, Mr. Costigan beguiling the time by cracking a grim joke on the sun, which there was no necessity to toss up for on this occasion, as it was obviously impossible to decide in what part of the firmament the luminary was buried. The ground was paced by Colonel Beauchamp—backed at one extremity by a hill, and at the other by a wood. The signal agreed upon was, “One, two, three!” and Costigan won the advantage of giving it. The pistols were now drawn and loaded; and nothing more was to be done but to place the principals on the ground.

As Costigan walked with Henry Winston to the spot assigned to him, he whispered:—“I’m to give the signal ‘One—two, three!’ I’ll pause between ‘one—two;’ ‘three’ will follow instantly—‘two, three!’ There’s a little path on the hill behind him—keep your eye on that, and you’ll cover him.”

The principals were now placed, and the seconds withdrew midway on opposite sides.

“Now, gentlemen,” cried Costigan.

Colonel Beauchamp made a slight movement with his hands, as if he were putting on his gloves.

“I’ll wait till you’re ready, Colonel Beauchamp,” said Costigan, quietly.

“I’m quite ready, sir,” returned Beauchamp.

“I know what I’m doing, sir,” replied Costigan, “and I’ll have no motions to distract attention while I’m giving the signal. If you’ve any objection to my proceedings, we can easily settle that afterwards.”

Colonel Beauchamp folded his arms, and stood perfectly still.

“Now, gentlemen,” resumed Costigan, after a pause, “One—two, three!”

Both pistols were discharged nearly at the same instant, and both parties kept their ground. When Costigan went up to Henry Winston, he found that the turf had been struck at his feet, but no mischief was done.

“Are you satisfied, gentlemen?” demanded Costigan.

The question was unnecessary. Lord Charles Eton still stood erect, but it was evident, from the way in which Colonel Beauchamp held him by the shoulder, that Winston’s ball had taken effect.

“Not hurt?” inquired Costigan.

“Not much, I hope,” replied Colonel Beauchamp, conveying by a side glance to Costigan that he feared the worst:

"may I trespass on your good offices, Captain Costigan, to send the surgeon to us—he is waiting in a carriage."

"With the greatest pleasure," replied Costigan, turning to Henry Winston, and hurrying him off the field. The surgeon was shut up in a postchaise on the road, and, as Costigan passed, he intimated to him that his services were required, and, regaining his own carriage, drove back to town as fast as an indifferent pair of horses could carry them.

Henry Winston's ball had entered below the shoulder, and by the time the surgeon arrived, Lord Charles was becoming faint from loss of blood, and was suffering severe pain. A rapid examination on the ground discovered to them that the ball was lodged somewhere amongst the vessels, and doubts were entertained whether they could convey the wounded man across the field without obtaining the aid of a litter. But Lord Charles strenuously opposed any measure that would attract attention to his situation—he wished to get home quietly—and, supported between his friends, with struggling steps, sinking and stopping at intervals, he at last reached the postchaise, which proceeded with its bleeding burden, at a footpace, to Portman-square.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEATH-BED SECRET.

MR. FARQUHAR lost no time in following up the information he had received from Lord Charles, and had no sooner left Clara at home in Park-lane, than he proceeded to Northumberland-court in search of Mr. Poge, having previously taken care to apprise Mr. Rawlings of his movements.

Of Mr. Poge's antecedents he knew nothing; and regarding him simply as the utterer of a calumny, he considered it prudent to act with caution, under a reasonable apprehension that a man who could be guilty of uttering an injurious scandal would not be very scrupulous in trying to escape the consequences. Northumberland-court is a *cul de sac*, dark, narrow, and as still as a graveyard, inserted in the heart of the din of London. From the announcements on the windows, you perceive at once that the place is a *refugium* for single men of a loose and motley cast, whose requirements in the way of lodgings are limited to a graduated scale of bedrooms, and whose freedom of ingress is secured at all hours of the

night by latch-keys and lucifer-boxes. It is just the place in which an odd fish like Pogey, hanging upon the skirts of promises and delusive hopes, might be expected to take up his quarters. There was a puzzle about the number; but after inquiring at two or three houses, Mr. Farquhar discovered the right house at last. The door was opened by a sooty, sluttish girl, with a shockingly vixenish expression of countenance.

"Does a gentleman of the name of Pogey live here?" inquired Mr. Farquhar.

"Pogey? Three pair back," she replied, at the same moment darting into the parlour and slamming the door after her.

This unceremonious reception left Mr. Farquhar no alternative but to pursue the inquiry for himself, and he accordingly ascended the stairs in search of the "three pair back," to which he was directed. When he reached Pogey's door, which was cut in a thin partition, and papered over like the rest, he heard a hum of voices within, which assured him that the man he sought was at home.

"Come in!" cried a husky voice, in reply to his knock.

The room was an attic, with a single window stretching out amongst the tiles, a bed in one corner, a scrap of a table, some clothes scattered about in disorder, and hardly space enough for the three persons who were now enclosed in it—consisting of Mr. Pogey, who was lying on the bed, with his hand under his head, a lanky visitor, who was standing in the window recess, and Mr. Farquhar.

"Mr. Pogey?" inquired Mr. Farquhar.

"That is my name," returned Pogey, raising his head languidly. "Bless me!" he added, staring with surprise at the apparition of a stranger, and surveying Mr. Farquhar from head to foot, "I beg your pardon. I thought it was the laundress!"

The individual who stood in the window, and whose outline, in spite of the shabbiness of his dress, had a certain air of better days and gentility about it, now advanced towards Mr. Farquhar.

"I think," he said, "I have the pleasure of knowing this gentleman. Confoundedly dark here—but, if I don't mistake, I have met you at Mr. Rawlings's?"

"You have the advantage of me," returned the other; "I know Mr. Rawlings—but——"

"Mr. Farquhar, I think?"

"Quite right, sir: may I ask your name?"

"Dingle—Captain Scott Dingle—you remember me?"

"Oh! perfectly well. I am very glad to meet you."

"This gentleman is a friend of Mr. Rawlings, Pogeey."

"Very curious," remarked Pogeey; "just talking of him this moment. Great changes, sir, since I knew Mr. Rawlings first. The way of the world—one up, another down. I've had my rubs—wasn't all my life cribbed up in a den like this—eh, Dingle?"

Mr. Pogeey shuffled off the bed, and stood upright in the middle of the room. Great changes indeed! The pursy man had become flabby—the plump face had wasted downwards—his cheeks had fallen in heavy masses of skin over his jowls—and his rusty clothes hanging in patches upon him, betrayed the attenuated corpulence that had once filled them out so lustily. The merry twinkle of the eye was gone—a morbid and bilious tint lay upon his features—and a brown wig, bristling over with sprightly curls, gave a painfully ludicrous expression to his whole appearance. The original character of the man was exclusively preserved in his wig. His optimism still danced out in those comical little twists of hair; all the rest was a dead blank of disappointment and hopelessness.

"Glad to see any friend of Mr. Rawlings. Thought he hadn't forgotten me altogether!"

"It is on his business, Mr. Pogeey, I came here. You have known Mr. Rawlings a long time, I believe?"

"You may say that," returned Pogeey. "Known him? I have known him since he was a strip of a lad. Bless my soul! When I look back and think. The world is really a sort of magic lantern. I was well off when I knew Richard Rawlings first, eh? Do you remember, Dingle? I was a comfortable man then. Lord, Dingle, what we have seen and gone through in our time,—the ups and downs of this volcanic earth! It was the railways ruined me, sir: and just fancy now how strangely things turn up—they made the fortune of Richard Rawlings. Fortune and misfortune, sir—action and reaction all through the whole animal economy of man."

"Very true, sir—very true," replied Farquhar.

"'Pon my life! though," observed Dingle, "it *is* very wonderful what fluctuations take place in life. As for me, I am an old campaigner—hang it! I don't mind knocking about, only I'm not quite so young as I was, and it comes a little hard upon me now; but here's Pogeey—with a profession at his back—carried everything before him in Yarlton—such a man as

that, sir, ought to be able to live. Now, I'm fit for nothing, was bred to nothing—if I can't live like a gentleman, must starve like a gentleman. But, Pogey—devil take it, Rawlings ought to do something for him."

"I think I can answer for Mr. Rawlings," replied Farquhar, "that he is well disposed to serve his friends. They are not so plenty, Mr. Pogey, that a man can afford to turn his back upon them."

"Friends!" exclaimed Pogey, "I was going to say that you might as well look for a pin in a bundle of hay. But I have great faith, sir, in human nature; always had. There are all sorts of people to be found, if we only knew where to find them. That's my philosophy: never knew it fail yet. Miss to-day—hit to-morrow. Sound sense that, I believe. Three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, and plenty of room. Some people never think of that—now I am always thinking of it, and looking forward. Very odd I should be talking of Mr. Rawlings, and you should pop in just at the moment. Thought he wouldn't forget me! Ha! ha! ha! My philosophy isn't so bad, after all, Mr. Farquhar!"

Pogey was in high glee. For the thousandth time in his career of perpetual expectation he confidently believed that his cards were all trumps. He was perfectly oblivious of the little bit of sly treachery he had practised against Richard Rawlings; or, perhaps, if it did flash upon his memory, he trusted to the improbability of its ever having transpired against him.

"A cheerful philosophy, at all events," rejoined Mr. Farquhar; "and certainly much wiser than to give way to despondency. There's always help for people who are resolutely determined to help themselves. My object in calling upon you, Mr. Pogey, was to say that Mr. Rawlings is anxious to see you, and, as you understand the value of time so well, perhaps you would accompany me to him at once."

"Only too delighted," replied Pogey, "and under all manner of obligations to you for giving me the chance. We should never let the grass grow under our feet, you know—the cup and the lip—fine old saying that, and as true as the Gospel. I haven't lived all these years of my life in an indiscriminate row with mankind, as I may say, for nothing—depend upon that. Ready for you in three minutes."

While Pogey was bustling about the room, Dingle put in a claim to join them. He hadn't seen Rawlings for weeks past, and was intending every day to give him a look in. Mr. Far-

quhar was a little reluctant at first to admit a third party to their counsels ; but, as Dingle seemed to know so much of Pogeys history, he thought Mr. Rawlings might find him useful, and so he consented to give him a seat in the cab that was waiting to convey them to Park-lane. When they turned out into the daylight, dim as it was, the seediness of their wardrobes was revealed in detail. They realised the perfect ideal of those sinister, threadbare figures we see skulking about the streets, whom we pass with a vigilant hand upon our pockets, and hope to see dogged at a safe distance by a lynx-eyed policeman. We sometimes do injustice to poverty in this matter ; for, if it were as innocent as a babe, it cannot help looking suspicious.

Mr. Rawlings had waited at home expecting Mr. Farquhar. The meeting was a remarkable illustration of the "ups and downs" Pogeys spoke of. Since he and Mr. Rawlings had seen each other last, they had been severally projected to the opposite extremities of prosperity and distress : the relation which they held to each other in the first days of their acquaintance, when Pogeys was on the pinnacle of his Yarlton glory, and Richard Rawlings was a scrub and drudge in Noah's ark, had been inverted to an extent of exaggeration very difficult of belief ; yet, notwithstanding the grand house and retinue of servants on the one side, and the sunken penury on the other, the predominant characteristics of both remained pretty much the same. Richard was as impassive and unimpressionable as ever, and Pogeys was still blatant in his rags. The latter worthy individual little suspected, when he flustered into the fine drawing-room, trying not to look sheepish and abashed, and endeavouring to work himself up into the burly and topping mood of the old times, how short a distance in the way of worldly aggrandizement really separated them at that moment !

"Well," exclaimed Pogeys, after the first salutations were over, dry and curt enough on Mr. Rawlings' part, "I *did* hear you had a fine place, and all the rest of it ; but really this is beyond everything. A palace—actually a palace ! What a sight of money you must have laid out ! Well, it is a pleasure, after all, to see one's friends flourishing. It's quite out of all calculation."

"Superb, isn't it, Pogeys ?" cried Dingle, sauntering negligently about the room, with the air of one who was familiar with grandeur of that sort.

"Superb? Magnificent—really. Ah! Mr. Rawlings, you *are* the fortunate man; but I must say you deserve it,—never let go the main chance—industry, perseverance, steady as old Time. Never knew it fail—except in my own case. I'm an exception to the general rule. Don't know how it is, but it slipped somehow through my fingers. Thought I was pretty safe, too; kept my eye on business, morning, noon, and night; turned everything to account, never lost an opportunity, worked like a horse—all no use. Business ran away from me like water through a sieve. And now, where am I? Actually nowhere. But it might have been worse; and I often think that's a great comfort, Mr. Rawlings. Too prudent to marry—now that I call a hit. True political economy adapted to the use of families. Where should I be now if I had married? Just think—a houseful of children, and no house to put them in. Capital joke that would be—eh?"

"Much better as it is, Mr. Pogey," said Rawlings, with a dryness in his voice that brought down Pogey's artificial spirits as effectually as a sudden frost acts on the sensitive mercury of the thermometer. "Better as it is. You have one advantage, at all events, over me, that you are pretty sure to escape envy and detraction."

"Envy? ah! yes—true. Nobody envies me, I dare say. But I don't know about detraction. Had my share of that. You can't conceive what I have suffered from the jealousy of the faculty."

"You are not singular," returned Rawlings; "I, who have been no man's rival, am made the mark of the basest detraction, from quarters, too, where I should have least expected it."

"You, Mr. Rawlings? You? oh! pooh!—you?—you can afford it. It don't affect you, you know—not a bit of it. If I were in your shoes, I'd let them say what they liked. Bring my philosophy to bear on it. But, lord! philosophy's no good to me now—no use for it, except to lend it to my friends—eh? Ha!" ending with a little broken spasm of a laugh, as if he were trying to work up the steam against the storm he saw gathering in Richard Rawlings' face.

"I can afford it less than you can, Mr. Pogey; but that is nothing to the purpose. You have known me a great number of years, and, although I am not in want of a certificate of character, I wish to ask you whether you are aware of any circumstance in my life which would justify a charge of dishonesty?"

"Dishonesty? There it is, you see; you rich men are so particular. Now they might charge a poor devil like me with dishonesty to the end of the chapter, and nobody would care a straw about it. Dishonesty? certainly not—of course not. Never heard such a thing hinted at—that I know of."

"You hear that, Mr. Farquhar?" said Rawlings.

"Very singular, indeed."

"Now, Mr. Pogeey," continued Rawlings, "as you never heard such a thing hinted at, I suppose you never could have hinted at such a thing yourself?"

"I, Mr. Rawlings?" stuttered Pogeey.

"You know Lord Charles Eton, I believe?"

"Know him? Can't say that I know him—can't pretend to that honour exactly—but—yes—I have seen him."

"Precisely; you have seen him. Now, try and recollect whether you ever had any conversation with him about me."

"Well—I think it not improbable."

"Lord Charles seems to have a clearer memory of what you said than you have yourself, Mr. Pogeey. He informs me that my employer, on his death-bed, took me into his confidence, and that I abused the trust he placed in me by turning it to my own advantage; and he gives you up as his authority."

At this point of the conversation, Dingle, with his instinctive delicacy, interposed.

"I'm afraid I'm rather in the way here. No ceremony with me, you know. Only say the word, and I'm gone."

"On no account," said Rawlings; "I should like you to hear Mr. Pogeey's explanation."

Pogeey's face was the picture of consternation.

"Explanation, Mr. Rawlings?" he stammered out; "don't talk in that way. You'll really destroy my nerves. I haven't the stamina I used to have. I'm dilapidated, and find my memory terribly shattered latterly."

"Shattered or not, you must know whether you had any grounds for such a statement."

"None at all—none in the world. What could I know of a breach of trust? I never heard what old Raggles confided to you. If you remember, you wouldn't tell me."

"It is the more extraordinary, then, that, not knowing what the trust was, or whether there was a trust at all, you should assert that I had abused it."

"No! Did I say so? Did I really? Very extraordinary indeed—very. Can't at all account for it, except that my

head isn't altogether in a satisfactory condition. Brains, Mr. Rawlings, will suffer—wear and tear—wear and tear."

"How did you become acquainted with Lord Charles Eton?"

"I can explain that. You know I was sold up at Yarlton—obliged to turn to something else; so I laid my case before the Earl of Dragonfelt."

"The Earl of Dragonfelt? Ha!—I see."

"He was always a patron of mine, you know—attended the household round for twenty pounds a year—never lost a patient, though in the long run I lost them all. His lordship couldn't do anything for me—rather hard up himself. Strange reverses in this world, to be sure! But he gave me a letter of introduction to Lord Charles. That was it. Natural, you know, I should speak of you, Mr. Rawlings—of course, that's the way it happened. I dare say I did say something about old Raggles—never could make it out myself—perhaps I said so."

"I think we have got the clue at last, Mr. Farquhar," said Rawlings; "my friend Pogeys is evidently in the interest of his patron, the earl, and, no doubt, thought he might serve his own purposes by retailing a little scandal against me. But we will set that right in a moment. Dingle, will you do me the favour to touch the bell."

Dingle, who was sitting near the bell-rope, gave it a smart pull, while Pogeys remained motionless in his chair, looking as frightened as if he expected to see Lord Charles step into the room to confront him. The bell was answered by Crikey Snaggs.

"Crikey Snaggs," said Rawlings, "I wish you to be a witness to a statement I have to make to these gentlemen. Shut the door, and stand over there. You remember when Mr. Raggles died?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have lived with me, I believe, ever since?"

"Never been a day from you, sir."

"Very well. I have always told you that if you served me faithfully I would take care of you."

"And haven't you, sir, more than ever I can repay, if I was to work my hands off. I have reason to pray for you, sir, every night and morning, for I was nothing but an orphan—hadn't a friend in the world when you took me up, and put me to school, and brought me up—and more than that, sir, if you would let me tell it."

"That's enough at present. Now, gentlemen," continued

Rawlings, "I feel that I am justified in relieving myself from a responsibility which has long pressed upon me, and which I should have relinquished without calling in witnesses, if I had not been assailed by a foolish and malignant calumny. I must vindicate myself by showing what was the nature of the trust reposed in me by Mr. Raggles, and how I have discharged it."

"La-a!" breathed Pogey hard between his teeth, and listening with intense curiosity—the most lively faculty that remained to him.

"Mr. Raggles," resumed Mr. Rawlings, after a short pause, "had passed through a dissipated youth into an old age of thrift and avarice."

"That's true," cried Pogey; "he lived upon crusts. Never could get him to try a generous diet. Mere skin and bone when he died."

"The follies of his blood were over when I knew him, but they had left a legacy behind which nobody suspected. When he was dying he sent for me, and, as he desired to speak to me alone, I was obliged to get my good friend Pogey, here, who was attending him, to leave us together."

"Ha! ha! I remember!" cried Pogey.

"He had but a few moments to live, but long enough to put me in possession of a pocket-book that contained the one miserable secret of his life, which he had hidden from all the world, and which pressed heavily at that hour upon his conscience. Here is the book exactly as I received it. Upon one of the pages you will find his last will and testament—the only one he could ever prevail upon himself to make—and on a loose sheet of paper an authority by which I was empowered to carry out its provisions. Will you read it aloud, Mr. Farquhar?"

Mr. Farquhar took the book, and with some difficulty deciphered the writing, which was in a cramped, straggling hand.

"I hereby confess myself of all my manifold sins, and ask forgiveness for them at the Throne of Grace, where no sinner, whoso repenteth, is turned away; but in particular that which burdens me most heavily in not acknowledging my own flesh and blood in my natural lifetime, the which I have not done in respect of my dear wife, for her sake. But that it may be done after my death, this is my last will and testament—to wit, and so forth, that I have placed out at interest in the Yarlton Loan and Deposit Bank the sum of 500*l.* sterling,

value received, to accrue for the use of Crikey Snaggs, who is my lawfully begotten son out of wedlock before I was married to Barbara Flight, by Susan Jones, her body; and the said Susan Jones being called to her account the said Crikey Snaggs is to inherit the same for his sole use and benefit. To which I put my hand as witness thereof, and God pardon me my sins and transgressions.

THOMAS RAGGLES."

The reading of the latter part of this curious document was much interrupted by some wild demonstrations of amazement on the part of Crikey Snaggs. His features passed through a series of contortions, growing white and scarlet by turns, while he twisted his hands and knuckles together in an excruciating manner, uttering a guttural cry that resembled the gurgling scream of a man going off in a fit. A crush of wonders had come upon him all at once—the astounding discovery that he had had a father, a fact of which he had been accustomed all his life to entertain a considerable doubt; then that his father should be no other than Mr. Raggles, a person he always thought of with a feeling of awe; and then the legacy of 500*l*.! Altogether he was quite thrown out of his equilibrium, and nothing but the presence of Richard Rawlings restrained him from indulging in a dance of frenzy about the room.

Having concluded the will and testament, Mr. Farquhar proceeded to read the other document, which contained merely an authority to Richard Rawlings, in the same to-wit and so-forth style, to dispose of the 500*l*. for the benefit of the aforesaid Crikey Snaggs. It was apparently of subsequent date to the former, and, from the tremor and uncertainty of the penmanship, seemed to have been written only a short time before the death of the testator.

"You will perceive," observed Rawlings, "that the secret was not mine to disclose. How far I have discharged the trust so strangely put upon me, you have in part heard from the young man himself. I took some pains about his education, enabled him from time to time to collect little savings, and I believe at this moment he is pretty well off for a person in his situation in life."

Crikey testified to the fact, by a convulsive effort to express his gratitude, which the other motioned him to suppress.

"I take no credit to myself," continued Rawlings, "for what I have done. Crikey is not my debtor—the obligation

is the other way. When I received that 500*l.* for his use, found he had been so ill-cared for, morally and physically, that I could not apply it to his benefit at once, and thought the best thing I could do for him was to bring him up in my own house till the time came when he might be able to make the most of his advantages. In the meanwhile I held it in my own hands, and employed it successfully. It was so useful to me at that time, that we are fairly quits on the score of obligation. And now," he added, drawing a small strip of paper from his pocket, "the time has arrived when I may resign my trusteeship, and in your presence hand over the amount of the legacy, to which I have added a trifle as a reward for faithful services."

Pogey looked sadly bewildered throughout this scene. He was labouring under the disagreeable sensations of a culprit who had been fairly detected, rebuked, and dismissed to "sin no more." The good sense and generosity displayed in the conduct of this transaction by Richard Rawlings confused and overwhelmed him; but he contrived to splutter out some flourishing apophthegms notwithstanding.

"Very astonishing, indeed! Old Raggles of all men—that Crikey Snaggs should be his son! I must say I always thought there was something peculiar, remarkably peculiar, about Crikey. Five hundred pounds! Incredible, isn't it? That Crikey Snaggs should actually be worth five hundred pounds, and I, who have been working at a profession for half a century, not worth a doit! The voyage of life, sir!—strange, how some men are tossed about, to be sure, while others sail direct into port. Can't comprehend it."

"Yet it is easily comprehended, Mr. Pogey," observed Rawlings; "men who are always trimming their sails and tacking about with every wind cannot expect to make land like men who pursue a straight course on their voyage; and it is not very surprising if they should be shipwrecked at last. I'm afraid that's your case; and if you will allow me to give you a little friendly advice, I would recommend you in future not to trust too much to your skill in tacking, but to make the best headway you can. In this instance you have made an egregious blunder, for you have failed in securing the patronage of Lord Charles Eton, which you hoped to propitiate by casting odium upon me, and you have forfeited for ever all claim upon any services I might have been disposed to render you. You have trimmed between us till you have lost both."

It was a severe lesson to poor chapfallen Pokey. He felt as if his whole life had been that instant swept up like so much dust, and blown out of the window. He wished he could be blown out of the window himself, or up the chimney, or anywhere, so that he could only get out of the presence of that stony man. Never was a system of philosophy so shattered at a single blow, just like a house of cards knocked down by a wave of the finger; and never was a man so delighted as Pokey when he escaped at last clear out of the house under the arm of the good-natured Dingle, whom he entertained all the way down the street with a heart-rending homily on the vicissitudes of life, rounding it off by declaring that much as he had studied human nature, he was puzzled more than ever to make it out.

Crikey lingered in the room, as if he had something on his mind to say, but didn't know exactly how to say it.

"Well, Crikey," said Rawlings, "what is it? What can I do for you?"

"Why, sir, if I might make bold, sir," said Crikey, crumpling the cheque in his hand, and looking down slyly at the carpet, "I wanted to know, sir, what name I'm to go by. Are they to call me Crikey Raggles, if you please, sir?"

"No—no—" replied Rawlings. "You had better keep the name you're used to, Crikey. Only take care of your money, and your name will take care of itself."

"Thank you, sir," returned Crikey; "but if you'd only please to do something with it for me——"

"Well—we must see about that another time. Now, Mr. Farquhar," continued Rawlings, when Crikey had left the room, "what is your opinion of Lord Charles?"

"That he has acted hastily, to say the least. But a proper explanation will bring about a better understanding between you."

"It is too late," said Rawlings; "a man who runs away from a falling house, is not to be drawn back when it is in ruins."

"I trust your affairs are not so hopeless as you seem to apprehend."

"You shall judge for yourself," replied Rawlings. "I have had demands made upon me to an overwhelming extent as a principal, where I was only an agent; and the companies for whose interests I worked zealously and successfully have abandoned me, and left me to fight their battle single-handed. And these very companies, Mr. Farquhar, including men of

birth and station, who would be highly indignant if you expressed a doubt of their honour, were glad enough to divide profits, when profits were to be had, although they now fly from their responsibility in the hour of reckoning. If I had a gold mine at my feet, I could neither pay their demands, nor contest them through the courts of appeal. There is, therefore, only one practicable course left to me—to make the best compromise I can, in the hope of snatching something out of the wreck. Such is my position. If the disclosure has cost me a struggle, be assured it is not on my own account.” As he uttered these words, a slight hectic flush passed over his face.

“I understand you,” returned Farquhar, “and appreciate your confidence. Professions between us, Mr. Rawlings, would be misplaced; but if it be in my power——”

“I thank you,” interrupted Rawlings, “I thank you with all my heart. But I dare not accept aid in any form from you—you who have shown such magnanimity—who link yourself with us in our misfortunes! I remember the noble fortune one daughter received on her marriage with a man she loathed—and I feel bitterly that the other——”

“Is richer in herself,” exclaimed Farquhar, “than a thousand fortunes. Fortunately I can afford to dispense with the wealth which I know it would have gratified you to bestow on Clara. Give her to me without a shilling, and you will make me the happiest man in the world.”

Rawlings was deeply touched, but made a great effort to control his feelings. Pressing Farquhar’s hand in silence, he made a movement to leave the room, and when he reached the door, he said, in a low voice that trembled with emotion,

“I will send her to you.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN AFTER THE DUEL.

THE fog still hung heavily over the streets, growing darker and darker as the morning advanced, when a postchaise slowly entered Portman-square, and stopped opposite the door of Lord William Eton’s house. Fletcher, the confidential servant of Lord Charles, had apparently been on the watch for its return; and, opening the hall-door as it drew up, looked out, with an expression of inquisitive anxiety on his face. Co-

lonel Beauchamp having alighted, and left the surgeon in charge of his wounded friend, beckoned Fletcher aside.

"Is Lord William down yet?"

"He is at breakfast, sir."

"Let him know that I should be glad to speak with him presently; and, Fletcher, keep the servants out of the hall for a few minutes. Is Lady Charles up?"

"I believe she is dressing, sir."

Fletcher glided back into the house

Lord Charles was conveyed into the hall with difficulty. He had suffered severely from the motion of the carriage, which the surgeon would have obviated by procuring a litter, but his lordship was obstinate, and overruled him. His pride, galled and humiliated by the triumph of his antagonist, was paramount to the sense of danger. He would have borne, without wincing, tenfold the pain that racked him, rather than have avowed the full extent of it. But pain will assert its mastery over the stubborn spirit at last; and when the wounded man was carried into the study, at the back of the dining-room—for it was impossible to get him up-stairs into his own chamber—the struggle was over, and he fainted.

Silent movements, whispering, and stealthy steps, indicated the preparations that were making for converting the room into a sick chamber. His lordship was undressed, and placed upon a large couch; and the surgeon, having now examined the nature of the wound more carefully, declared that he did not like to assume the whole responsibility himself, and that it would be necessary at once to hold a consultation. In the meanwhile the requisite measures were taken to ensure quietness: Fletcher was placed in attendance, and Colonel Beauchamp proceeded to communicate the distressing intelligence to Lord William Eton. His lordship was strongly attached to his nephew. It was the only domestic tie he had cherished through a life of what may be described as town asceticism. Harsh and repulsive to the rest of the world, this was the relenting point of his character, at which his affections flowed out freely from their pent-up channels. The news of the disaster that had happened shook him fearfully. Of all men, Lord Charles was the last he should have expected to find engaged in such an affair; but the reflection that was hardest to bear, and hurt him most, was that his nephew should have concealed it from him. Had he taken him into his confidence, the terrible catastrophe might have been averted.

"A heavy responsibility rests on you, Colonel Beauchamp," he said, "for not having consulted me on this business. You, sir, are an older man than Lord Charles; and at your time of life, with your experience, what was the reason you did not instantly inform me of what was going on? You have acted ill, sir,—ill, sir; very ill."

"Pardon me, my lord," replied the colonel; "we must not judge these matters by results. Your nephew's reputation was at stake; and, as a military man, honoured by his confidence, I dared not have acted otherwise than I did."

"Reputation! Do you think, sir, I would have risked his reputation? It was dearer to me than my life. Do you suppose I would have suffered him to lie under an insult? But it is too late to talk about it now. What does the surgeon say? Is there any danger?"

"At three o'clock there will be a consultation, and nothing can be determined with certainty till then. All that can be done at present is to keep him quiet. Marsh has left instructions with Fletcher, and will return himself presently. Let me advise you not to see him yet."

"Not see him? But I will see him, sir. What! not see my boy that I have trained up from childhood, my companion, my dear boy Charles? I have seen as much of the world as most men, Colonel Beauchamp, and have had some trials—bitter ones—in my time: but this—this,—is the greatest blow of all. Don't be alarmed—I will not disturb him—I will not speak to him—but I must see him."

"The least excitement may be attended with dangerous consequences. Marsh impressed that upon us."

"Yes, yes—I understand."

"I was anxious, my lord, to say something else to you. It is necessary that this matter should be broken to Lady Charles."

"Poor soul—poor soul!"

"Perhaps, my lord, you would undertake——"

"Well—by-and-by. Just see if I can go into the room."

Colonel Beauchamp withdrew, and left his lordship alone. His thoughts ran over the roll of his family, of which the last member who had won a name in the world lay insensible before him. He thought, also, of Grace Hunsdon, and of the conversation he had had with Lord Charles when the union with Margaret Rawlings was first discussed between them, and he involuntarily contrasted the happy fate of that poor peasant

girl with the doom that was hanging over the richly-dowered Margaret. He almost blamed himself for giving way to his nephew's arguments on that occasion, and felt in some measure responsible to her for the blight that would fall upon her life if this affair should prove fatal to her husband. He was not unconscious of the unhappiness that attended their marriage; he even felt at this moment of poignant grief that he had in some measure contributed to it himself; and the sympathy which springs from a common calamity, gave her a new interest in his heart. Thinking of what she had suffered—of the isolation of her position—her youth—and the trial that lay before her, he was more touched by her bereavement than his own.

Lord William Eton was not the sort of man of whom such generous and kindly emotions could have been predicated on the surface; but how little do we know of the latent sensibilities of men in their ordinary intercourse with the world!

In a few minutes Colonel Beauchamp returned, and Lord William descended with him to the study. The room was carefully darkened, and, fearful of disturbing the patient, they entered noiselessly. Lord William approached the head of the couch, and bent down to listen. His nephew was breathing hardly, and unconscious of his presence. The case seemed even worse than he had feared, and he drew back with a slight tremor, and passed his hand over his eyes. There was a rustle at the door, and standing in the dim light of the hall, as if she were hesitating whether she should come in, he discerned the figure of Lady Charles. Colonel Beauchamp was interposing to prevent her entrance with a motion of his hands, entreating her to retire. It was no place for her.

"What is the matter?" she demanded, in a low voice of Colonel Beauchamp.

"Hush!—madam—not here," he returned.

Lord William, summoning up a great effort for the painful task he had to perform, went towards the door, and as he passed out to Lady Charles, Colonel Beauchamp whispered to him, "Better not tell her the particulars."

She was standing there mute and paralysed. Lord William took her gently by the hand, and led her away.

"Patience—patience, and, you shall know everything. We must control ourselves for *his* sake."

The tone of his voice affected her more than his words. There was a tenderness in it which made tears spring into her eyes. It was the first time he had ever spoken to her so

softly—the first accents of sympathy, or comfort, or affection—and they were all blended in his subdued and tremulous voice—she had ever heard in that house.

“We must be patient, and hope for the best,” he said. Both her hands were clasped in his, and, as he looked into her pallid face, full of terror and confusion, the habitual harshness of his features appeared to her changed into an expression of pity and affliction.

“What is it, my lord?” she exclaimed; “what has happened?”

“Lord Charles has met with an accident—I hope not very serious. But you must control yourself. You know how necessary it is that we should not betray any emotion before him?”

“What accident? I entreat of you to relieve me from this dreadful suspense. May I not go to him, and attend him?”

“Not at present. He must be kept very quiet, and your presence would only agitate him.”

“You do not answer my question. How did it happen? He went out early this morning, and has met with an accident. How—where—what is it?”

“Margaret,” replied his lordship, “I expect you will act with courage and resignation, when I have told you what has happened. I am not justified in concealing it from you; but I expect you will bear it patiently. I look to you for an example of that fortitude which, I confess, I find it not easy to exercise myself.”

“Indeed, my lord,” she returned, “I am very grateful to you for the kindness and consideration you show me. I will try and act as you would have me. It has been my constant desire to do so.”

“I know it—I feel it; and I owe you some atonement for the unhappiness I have observed growing upon you in this house. Your life here has not been what a young wife had a right to anticipate. We have been harsh—harsh; our habits and mode of life have made us cold to you. No—you must hear me—it eases my heart to speak to you; it is not a time for pride now, when he, in whom all my ambition was centred, lies, perhaps—but we must hope for the best.”

“He is not in danger, my lord?”

“I cannot answer for that. We shall know the worst presently. I am an old man, and have had calamities to bear

like other men. They closed my heart upon the world. You see what a solitary life I lead—but I was not always a misanthrope. Margaret! we will not speak of that. This trouble has touched a chord I had thought was silent for ever. From a certain period I relinquished society—there was no pleasure or joy in it for me. I garnered up all my hopes and affections in *him*—it was the object that engrossed me; and now, should this accident end badly, my pride will be rebuked, and turned to dust!” He covered his face with his hands, and Margaret, in the depth of her fear of what was coming, held a breathless silence. “But you will be left to me,” he resumed; “you bear his name—he told me he loved you. It was that which won my consent to his marriage. I believed you loved him, and, harsh as you think me, I resigned all the views I had for him from that consideration alone.”

“You wring my heart, my lord—I so little expected this from you.”

“I have judged more wisely since. Charles is a man of ambition, qualified by nature and education to make a great figure in the world. Men of that kind are not always as tender as they might be of the feelings of women. But, if this affliction should pass from us, he will prize you more highly than ever. You deserve it—and it shall be my grateful task to see that you are cared for, and nurtured as you deserve.”

“Oh! my lord—pray spare me. Your goodness overwhelms me. I hardly know what to say or think. I fear to ask.”

“I promised to tell you what has happened; and, indeed, it cannot be concealed, and it is better you should hear it from me, than that it should reach you from any other quarter. Lord Charles, I hardly know how it occurred, or what it arose from, was drawn unfortunately into a quarrel. It is gratifying to know that he was not the aggressor, and that the slightest blame does not rest upon him—I am assured of that.”

“A quarrel, my lord? When?—with whom?”

“It seems that it took place under very strange circumstances the other evening at the Opera.”

“At the Opera?—My God!”

“Margaret!—you must be more firm. Look up—compose yourself.”

“I dare not ask you—do not tell me—who?—no—no—do not tell me who it was—I would rather be ignorant of that—hide it from me, my lord. Oh! God, now, indeed, my cup of wretchedness is full”

"I am not surprised at this emotion. It is natural you should regard with horror the man who has brought this upon us. But we must be just even to him, Margaret. We must not allow our grief to stifle our justice. If it be found that his conduct is capable of vindication, we must subdue our feelings, and be silent. It is only reasonable to remember that he took his chance of the issue, and might have been the victim of it himself."

"Ah! Lord William—what a noble and generous heart you have. And Lord Charles is wounded—it is horrible to think of it! What do they say?"

"Marsh, the surgeon, is attending him, but declines to give any opinion until he has had a consultation. This looks bad—it may be over-caution, or anxiety; yet we must not conceal from ourselves, that, if the wound were slight, he would have no difficulty in saying so at once. That is the worst feature of the case."

"When may I be permitted to see him?"

"That must be determined by the medical men. You had better send for your sister, and let her remain with you. I promise you that as soon as they consider it safe, you shall be admitted; and I am sure you will act with discretion—his life may depend upon it."

The agony that Margaret underwent through the latter part of this conversation, was rendered more intense by the necessity of concealing the apprehensions it suggested. She ran over in her mind all the incidents of that fatal evening—the wild manner of Henry Winston—the sullenness of Lord Charles—and then this duel following so rapidly—all seemed clear, except that she could not comprehend when or how the quarrel took place, for Lord Charles entered her box almost immediately after the departure of Henry Winston, who would never have visited her if they had quarrelled previously. In putting all these things together, the difficulty was to understand when it occurred. Yet it was at the Opera, and who could it be if it was not Henry Winston? She wished to believe it was any one else—she recoiled from the thought that it came from *his* hand. She was not suffered to remain long in suspense. A low knock at the door startled her out of this train of speculations, followed by the entrance of Fletcher, who in dumb show drew Lord William aside, and whispered to him.

"To inquire?" demanded Lord William.

"Yes, my lord."

"The gentleman himself?"

"No, my lord—a servant, with Mr. Winston's compliments."

Margaret caught the name, and gasped—"Who is it, Fletcher?"

Fletcher looked at Lord William.

"My compliments," said Lord William, drawing himself up with dignity, "his lordship is going on, we hope, favourably."

Fletcher withdrew.

"You will not deceive me, I know," exclaimed Margaret, grasping Lord William by the arm, and gazing earnestly in his face; "I am sure I heard the name—what did *he* want here?"

"To inquire after Charles."

"He?—Henry Winston? I know it was he. Why should *he* inquire?"

"Why? It is not unusual, Margaret—rather creditable to him—though, at this moment, I could have dispensed with his courtesy."

"Not unusual? If you have the least pity for me, you will explain what this means. I have known Henry Winston all my life—we were children together—Lord Charles knew him at college—they were then inseparable—oh! could I blot out that from my memory—could I forget the things that happened—you shall judge for me, Lord William, what must be my despair to think that it is from his hand Lord Charles is suffering—perhaps by his hand—my senses will forsake me!"

"Then you know the cause of their quarrel?"

"It *was* he!—I knew it—it *was* Henry Winston!"

"I will not deceive you. It was Mr. Winston."

"Merciful Heaven! that I should be the cause of this!" The exclamation escaped her, and it was scarcely uttered, when she would have recalled it—but it was too late.

"You?" exclaimed Lord William, recoiling from her with a look of astonishment.

"No—I did not mean that. I am ignorant of how or when they quarrelled. It has come upon me like an avalanche, and seems to carry away my reason. Do not heed my words. I know nothing."

Lord William felt that there was a deeper import in that burst of emotion than mere alarm or surprise; but in the state of nervous agitation into which she was thrown, it was

necessary to approach the subject cautiously. He led her gently to a seat, entreating her to collect herself, and went on.

"I was aware that Mr. Winston was formerly acquainted with Lord Charles, but I did not know he was a friend of yours."

"It was before our marriage, my lord—we have not met since—I have never seen him, or heard of him since, till that evening at the Opera."

"Did you meet by accident at the Opera?"

"I implore you to ask me no more questions. I know nothing of what happened."

"There is something in this unfortunate affair you are anxious to conceal from me, Margaret. I cannot, of course, divine your reasons; but you wrong me and yourself by withholding your confidence from me."

"Indeed, I would trust you with my most secret thoughts—you are too noble not to decide justly and compassionately—but this—I dare not—to you!—no—no—I dare not!"

"Yes—to me of all men you may most safely open your heart. You think that my affection for Charles would prejudice my judgment. You do me an injustice. You do not know me—we have not hitherto known each other as we ought—we have been estranged, and an unnatural distance has been between us—but we must make amends to each other in the future. Whatever befalls us, Margaret, for good or ill, you must learn to look upon me as your friend and protector."

"I did not expect this," she replied, in a stifled voice; "I do not deserve it. I now feel how little I understood your worth—your great goodness and kindness—believe me, I am very grateful!" and, bursting into tears, she sank upon her knees at his feet.

"Come—come, not thus."

"No—here on my knees, I will tell you all. There is a load upon my heart, and I feel I can speak to you now. Give me one moment. We grew up from childhood almost under the same roof; and were never parted till he went to college. We met again in London—early feelings were revived—we—you understand?"

"Clearly. You may spare that explanation."

"How considerate you are. You give me courage to speak. I know not how to tell my story without seeming to bring shame upon myself. You will condemn me—I fear you will;

but no condemnation can equal my own remorse. But, indeed, I am not to blame. We were sundered by violence—all hope of happiness in this world went with him. My father commanded me to receive Lord Charles. What did it matter how they disposed of me? I was a blighted creature, and did not care what doom lay before me. There was no struggle then between my heart and my duty, for in that separation I was betrayed into the belief that he had broken his faith; and in that belief I submitted to my father's will, and—married. But it was false! They had deceived us both—and happy had it been for both had we lived on deceived, and never met again!"

"Was Lord Charles aware of your attachment?"

"I think he must have known it; he could not have mistaken my manner—but no censure upon him! He treated my feelings with forbearance, as if he understood my sufferings, and respected them. I was thankful to him for that, honoured him for it, and believed that I should be able to repay his generosity by dedicating myself to his happiness. I tried—I tried—I banished all thoughts but the one thought of what I owed to him—he was all to me—he might have secured my peace and his own—but——"

Lord William shook his head.

"You have thrown a light upon your mutual position that makes many things clear to me which were dark before. I will not say to you what I think of his conduct. I ignorantly attributed the coldness I have observed between you to other causes—but its springs are evident now. He knew of your attachment, and married you; and Mr. Winston was his friend! It was base—money on one side, vile ambition on the other—and you, weak, deceived, indifferent to your fate, the victim of both."

The condition of his nephew, hovering at that moment between life and death, restrained him from giving full vent to his indignation. But he felt keenly and bitterly the wrong that had been done to Margaret, and to which he had been, in some sort, made a party. He had been duped into his consent to the marriage on the plea of love; the story of Grace Hunsdon had been cited to work upon his feelings; and, now that he looked back upon the arguments Lord Charles had employed, he saw that he had cast but a thin disguise over his real motives. Deeply affected by the cruel position in which Margaret was placed, it became no less a point of honour than

of feeling with him to sustain and shield her. Her confidence was full and unreserved. She detailed all the circumstances of the meeting at the Opera, and the disclosures made by Henry Winston; and when he related to her the particulars of the abrupt rencontre in the lobby, there was no longer any doubt that it occurred immediately after Henry Winston had left her box. Margaret naturally feared that Lord William Eton would take a severe view of the conduct of the aggressor; and it was an unexpected relief to her to find that he pitied rather than blamed him. Had he confessed to her his real feelings, she would have discovered that his sympathies were warmly enlisted on his behalf.

At three o'clock the consultation was held on Lord Charles. The silence that brooded over the house was solemn and painful. The servants were strictly ordered out of the way—not a footfall was heard—and Margaret sat in her room alone, waiting for the return of Lord William. A long interval elapsed—the longer the more fraught with doubts and terrors. At last a step came to the door—she had not strength or energy to rise, but sat, paralysed with fear, to receive the intelligence he brought, which she fancied she could anticipate in the stricken expression of his face.

“I understand,” she cried convulsively, “there is no hope!”

“Be comforted,” he replied, kissing her forehead tenderly; “there is always hope while life remains. We must put our trust in God!”

CHAPTER VII.

THE DUELLO SEEN FROM DIFFERENT POINTS OF SIGHT.

WHEN Henry Winston went out to fight a duel with Lord Charles Eton, it never entered into his calculations to make any provision against such a contingency as that of shooting his antagonist. Few men ever do in these cases. The quarrel is the thing—the consequences are left to take care of themselves. Fortunately he was in the hands of an adviser who was prepared for all emergencies.

They had no sooner got clear of the field, than Costigan ordered the coachman “to drive as if the devil was after him,” and to make a *detour* from the high-road, for the purpose, as he informed his friend, of baffling the beaks, should they have got wind of what had happened.

"I fear, from the precautions you are taking," said Winston, "the wound is dangerous."

"Well—it's in an ugly place," returned Costigan; "and the bullet is lodged. That's the worst of it. There's no harm, at all events, in being on the safe side; and, until we know how he's going on, you must keep out of the way. The British public have an ignorant prejudice against duelling, which might make it inconvenient for you to be showing yourself about town."

"I shall never forgive myself, Costigan, if this business should end fatally."

"Forgive yourself? What would you be forgiving yourself for. Wasn't it equal main and chance? If it's any ease to your mind, let me tell you it wasn't for want of inclination he didn't whip you through the lungs. He was within a nick of you; his ball ripped up the grass at your feet---there's the spatter of it on your boots. The tenth part of an inch higher, and it would have been all up with you. Why then," he exclaimed, thrusting his head out of the window, and shouting to the coachman, "it's a fortune you're losing by not entering them horses for the Derby. I suppose they think we're running a race, they're in such a murderin' hurry."

All this time the horses, notwithstanding, were going at the top of their speed, but Costigan's impatience outstripped them. Arrived in Portland-street, he dismissed the carriage, and waiting cautiously till it was out of sight, he hurried Winston into a cab, and drove off to a retired hotel with which he was acquainted, in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

"It will never do," he said, when they arrived at the door, "for you to return to your lodgings. I'll be off at once and get the traps away before Mother Stubbs begins to suspect anything. Stay here quietly, and keep yourself to yourself—but we must send up your compliments to inquire how he's going on—that's the least you can do after shooting him under the wing like a garden thrush. Stop a minute," he added, peering into the dark hall of the hotel at a figure that was crossing at the back—"don't I know that figure? No matter—in with you, and up-stairs, and amuse yourself by repeating the Seven Penitential Psalms till I come back." Jumping into the cab, without waiting for a reply, he left Winston alone to indulge in his reflections on the rapid events of the morning.

Discouraging and gloomy enough they were. Whether Lord Charles lived or died, Margaret would never pardon him for that act of violence. He thought only of her, and of the agony of mind—the terror and remorse—she must have experienced at the sight of the spectacle of blood he had sent home to her. That horrible image, so revolting to the tenderness of a woman under any circumstances, but so cruel and harrowing to a wife, presented itself to him in the most appalling shapes, and filled him with self-reproaches. How could she make allowances for the madness that had instigated him to such an extremity. She, whose life was so calm and gentle, who was so disciplined in patience and resignation, how could she understand the tempest that had shaken his reason? Whatever hope he had previously nurtured of being remembered by her with pity, was gone for ever. Her pity was now concentrated on her husband, whom, by that fatal act, he had invested with claims upon her interest which he never possessed before.

The speedy return of Costigan, laden with luggage from Duke-street, interrupted these harassing reflections. It had become necessary to look after Winston's safety, which Costigan held to be paramount to all other considerations. The ambiguous answer from Portman-square did not satisfy him. He secretly believed that Lord Charles was worse than Lord William had represented him to be, and he promised Winston to set out himself in the course of the evening, and ascertain the fact.

Dinner was ordered at five, and the interval passed in laying plans for the future, in case the wound should prove fatal. Costigan urged upon his friend the prudential course of getting out of the way, and for better security running over to the Continent—strengthening his argument by reference to the famous text—

He who fights and runs away
May live to fight another day.

But, unfortunately, of all the reasons he could have selected at that moment for running away, the prospect of fighting another day was about the least persuasive. Winston declared he would stand his ground, and that no entreaties, arguments, or remonstrances could induce him to alter his determination. Costigan saw it was useless to persevere, and took advantage of the dinner to change the subject.

"There's somebody in the hotel that knows us," he said;

"I caught him looking out for me as I came in, but I gave him the slip."

"Who can it be?" inquired Winston.

"Whoever it is, I have a shrewd suspicion it isn't Lord Charles; so we needn't make ourselves uneasy on that score. A glass of wine with you, just to give a flavour to the veal. By my honour, Henry Winston, I'm proud of you. Your conduct this morning reflects immortal credit on you."

"Credit? Let us talk of something else."

Every now and then in his intercourse with Costigan there jarred a chord between them which made Winston secretly recoil from the companionship circumstances had so strangely cast him upon. No two men could be more dissimilar; the coarseness of the one constantly revolted the sensitive nature and fastidious tastes of the other; and there was something so haggard in the experiences of life which Costigan mapped out in his conversation, that Winston was sometimes conscious of a passing sense of degradation in the intimacy to which he had admitted him. But he was restrained from giving expression to his feelings on such occasions by a sense of the obligations he owed to him, and by a consideration of his better qualities, his real cordiality, his untiring good-nature, and that softness or tenderness which formed so singular an element in his character. Besides, Costigan was the only confidant he had, and men are slaves to their confidants in love affairs.

The allusion to his conduct in the morning awoke one of the discords that vibrated most painfully in Winston's heart. For Margaret's sake he would gladly have exchanged situations with Lord Charles; a piece of romantic magnanimity which was perfectly unintelligible to Costigan, who, like a professed duellist, regarded the affair only in its triumphal aspect.

Winston's reluctance to speak about the duel threw Costigan into a mood of bantering that made the matter rather worse; and when he began to boast of his pistols, and the execution they had done on former occasions, the thought flashed across Winston's mind, for the first time, that it was the possession of these very pistols, and the brooding over them in the country, which suggested to him, and kept perpetually before him, the design of fixing a quarrel on Lord Charles.

"Ay—those pistols. They were always in my room. I

looked at them every day. You remember what I said to you in my letter about them—I wondered should I ever have any use for them. I was like a man in a frightful dream; the dream is out. I *have* used them, and they have served me well!”

He looked across the table as he spoke, and the broad, wild face of Costigan, overspread with a lambent glow of satisfaction, seemed like the face of the Tempter, who had led him into the snare, and now exulted over his work. The feeling it inspired was dangerous, but he gulped it down in a glass of wine.

They had scarcely finished dinner, when they were startled by a sharp knock at the door. Costigan, who was one of those men that will never be taken alive, immediately started to his feet; but, before he could secure the door, it was somewhat unceremoniously opened, and Mr. Trumbull, to their mutual surprise, made his appearance in the room.

“I expect,” said he, “that you are rather astonished at seeing me; but the fact is, I have picked up at this hotel, and I thought I would just look in to see how you were getting on, as you are likely to be a little out of sorts by yourselves this evening. I’m a pretty good judge of human nature, and it strikes me that when a man’s in trouble, a friendly visit is a sort of social duty. That’s the way I look at it, Mr. Winston.”

Henry Winston was the more surprised at this friendly visit, as his acquaintance with Mr. Trumbull was very slight, but his surprise was considerably increased by the knowledge that gentleman seemed to possess of the circumstances in which he was placed. Mr. Trumbull soon left him in no doubt on the subject.

“It’s pretty well known, I calculate, by this time at the West End,” he observed; “I was calling this afternoon at Park-lane, and Mrs. Rawlings told me all the particulars.”

“I hope,” said Costigan, “you didn’t say you had seen us here?”

“I haven’t studied the customs of this remarkable nation in vain, Mr. Costigan. Secrecy is an element in your institutions, which, as a free-born republican, I abjure; but, as a stranger, I am bound to respect your usages, while I am enjoying your hospitality. It will be time enough when I get back to my own everlasting State of Massachusetts to enlighten the world as to my real opinion of England.”

"You intend to write a book upon us, then?" said Winston, glad of any pretext for changing the subject.

"Most assuredly. I have a sample or two of it in my pocket, if you'd like to hear how I walk into you. But I calculate you're hardly up to the mark for that, Mr. Winston. Your mind must be in a pretty considerable fix, and not exactly in a condition to enter upon philosophical inquiries. There again your institutions come in, extinguishing freedom of thought, and riling up your twenty-five millions of human beings, just as if they were so many niggers. It's my clear conviction that it's only under a democratic form of government the rights of man are eternally vindicated—that's a fact. If one gentleman has a wrong to settle with another, in my country, he may go slick at him, and shoot him in the streets. Now, if that ain't practical liberty, I should like to know under what part of the almighty canopy you're to find it?"

"Indeed, we should be at a loss to find it in such perfection anywhere else," observed Costigan, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes; "you're entirely right, Mr. Trumbull. That's the only country for a gentleman to live in. It's free and easy, it is, at all events; and I'm sorry to say that, in that particular, we're in a mighty benighted condition."

"You're out of sight behind us in the grand features of social progress and civilization. And you'll never rise to a dignified rank in the scale of nations till you get rid of your aristocracy, and establish liberty and equality over the length and breadth of the land. Your aristocracy, Mr. Costigan, is a regular system of slavery, and puts its brand upon you, just as the farmers brand cattle. The people have no more moral elevation than sheep in this country. I presume you won't deny that. Look at your hotels and public-houses: it seems to me as if the eternal 'coons gloried in their degradation, for everywhere you go you see them sticking up, in conspicuous signs, "The Marquis of Granby" and "The Duke of Wellington," and this lord's arms and that lord's arms. All England is branded over with the family marks of the proprietary class. That's one of the observations in my book."

"But, in the matter of duels, now," inquired Costigan; "how do you manage that in America?"

"There again," returned Trumbull, "we're ahead of you in a remarkable manner. All our institutions acknowledge the original law of individual freedom. Every man in the Union

possesses the inalienable right of fighting a duel in his own way. That's a fundamental principle. Our free citizens meet on a perfect equality; each man chooses his own weapon, and uses it at his discretion. They walk up to each other, and fire when they please; a privilege, I reckon, you're not likely to enjoy in this country till you make a clearance of your hereditary classes."

"I'm afraid not," returned Costigan.

"Now, just look at what you call public opinion, what a tectotal crusher it is of personal independence. No man can do as he likes here; he must do what other people like—that's a humiliating truth. If one man shoots another in the Union, it's his own business, and nobody meddles with him; but, if you take the law into your own hands here, which you'd have a clear right to do if you were a freeborn citizen, you've no more chance of your life than if you were pitched into a biler, and stewed down into soup. Now, Mr. Winston, that's the precise thing I came to talk to you about. From what I heard this evening, Lord Charles is in rather a dubious state, and, if he should sink under it, this is no place for you. I don't want to make any professions; but I esteem it a great privilege to do homage to a man of your stamp. I was born in Massachusetts, am true whale-bone, stub-twisted back and front, and no man in my country stands up against me without losing wind. Now, I'm going back by the States packet-ship *Old Virginny*, Captain Maddison Sandys, and if you'll put yourself under the shadow of Washington Trumbull, with the eternal banner of stripes and stars floating over you, I'll land you at New York, to the National Anthem of 'Hail Columbia!' and guarantee you liberty and security for the rest of your life."

This proposal was made with so much sincerity that Henry Winston, although a little inclined to be annoyed at the intrusion of a comparative stranger at such a moment, thanked Trumbull for the interest he took in his affairs, assuring him, at the same time, that he had no intention whatever of leaving England. In vain Trumbull described the enthusiasm with which he would be received in America, when it came to be known that he had been engaged in mortal combat with a lord, pledging himself that, if money was any consideration, he might make a fortune by lecturing through the States on the custom of duelling, as it is prac-

tised under slavish restrictions in the old class-ridden feudal communities. These alluring representations failed to convince the obstinate young gentleman to whom they were addressed. He still held to his resolution. Let the consequences be what they might, he had secretly set his heart upon seeing Margaret once more, and, when that was over, the rest of his life was a matter of perfect indifference to him.

Winston's anxiety to obtain intelligence about Lord Charles made him rather impatient of Mr Trumbull's criticisms on England and the English; and, after an hour or two wasted upon subjects extremely uninteresting to him, and especially distasteful under existing circumstances, he reminded Costigan of his promise to ascertain how Lord Charles was going on. A difficulty presented itself which, in the eagerness of his feelings, Costigan had not thought of before. The second was as much compromised as the principal, and it would have been hazardous in Costigan to present himself in person to make such inquiries. The difficulty, however, was removed by Trumbull, who, volunteering his services, started at once with Costigan for Portman-square.

Henry Winston was again left alone. An hour passed away, which he contrived to fill up with a multitude of ingenious self-tortures. The future shaped itself before him in a wild phantasmagoria of gloomy pictures, brightened here and there by rays of hope, that vanished as quickly as they came; and long before his reveries were interrupted by the return of his friends, he had succeeded in working himself into a most dreary and uncomfortable mood. The news he received operated beneficially on these morbid feelings, by at least resolving all doubt into certainty, and awakening him, with electric force, to the necessity of action.

It had been arranged between Trumbull and Costigan that the latter should announce the intelligence they had obtained; and he began with an exordium which so painfully delayed, while it betrayed the truth, that Winston, unable to endure the suspense, sprang from his chair, and appealed to Trumbull to relieve him, by telling him the worst at once.

It was told in one word. Lord Charles Eton was dead!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LAST TRIAL.

DEATH, even when it has given long notice of its approach, is a dismal thing in a house ; but more dismal still when it comes suddenly and violently in the midst of health, and in the confidence of manhood. Although the dead be one who had not drawn around him a solitary affection, he is missed when he is gone ; his loss severs some ties, breaks up the routine of old habits, and leaves a blank behind which time alone can fill with new associations and altered prospects.

Lord Charles Eton had not cultivated one ardent friendship ; and in his own home, where love might have grown had he cared to nurture it, the air was too cold for hearts to flower in. His uncle alone was strongly attached to him ; but it was less a feeling of affection than a sentiment of pride, cherished and dwelt upon in solitude, till it became a sort of necessity of his existence. Yet, unloveable as he was in his life, his death was a trouble in the small circle which it deprived of a familiar face and an accustomed footstep. Abroad in the world, through which he had moved with such a show of graciousness, there was a slight sensation—hardly of regret, rather of surprise and curiosity ; people thought it very shocking ; got up a story about the quarrel—which occupied them more than its issue—and then something else started up, and they forgot him in a week.

To Margaret, there was an undefined terror in the event. She was stunned by its suddenness. Her first impulse was self-examination. Had she been just to him ? Had she made allowances for his temper ? Had she estimated his character truly ? Was there no fault at her side ? Could she have averted that alienation which had recently divided them ? Could she have reconciled the family feud in the heat of which he was struck down ? A hundred such hurried questions and half-accusations thronged upon her mind. She looked back upon her marriage, and gathered up recollections of Lord Charles which, softened by distance and hallowed by natural regrets, drew out traits of his nature which she feared she had never appreciated ; and when her thoughts reverted to Henry Winston, a shudder passed over her. She shrank from the train of memories his image called up, and

tried not to think of him, as a person toiling through the mazes of a hideous dream, in which the forms of beloved objects are shown in agonies and distortion, endeavours in vain to shut them out. Henry Winston would still recur to her, let her seek to banish him as she might.

The bereavement of Lord William Eton was rendered less overwhelming by the disclosures Margaret had made to him, which shook his high opinion of Lord Charles, and invested her with new claims upon his sympathy. The place which the death of his nephew left vacant in his heart and household was insensibly occupied by her whom that nephew had so grievously wronged; and it was a balm and solace to him to tend and console her. His character had undergone a change. Austerity and harshness had given way to kindness and forbearance. Their relations were no longer formal and reserved; in the hour of domestic sorrow their hearts opened to each other, and the conventional distinctions which had hitherto kept them apart melted before the reality which pointed to that world where the pomps and vanities of earth are of no more account than the dust that lies mouldering in the coffin.

Clara, at the suggestion of Lord William Eton, had come to Portman-square after the death of Lord Charles. Mrs. Rawlings called every day; but her visits were not of much comfort to Margaret. She had got into a way of babbling, which is very oppressive to people who are suffering under mental distress. The good woman talked unwisely to her daughter; much, indeed, in the same strain as Nurse Waters had talked to her long ago when she had lost her own husband. She could see no help for any misfortune but to look forward and not think about it: the world was wide, and there were plenty of people in it; and Margaret was never very happy with Lord Charles; she knew well enough that, when she married him, she loved Henry Winston; it was wonderful, to be sure, what turns things take; look at herself—there was Rawlings nearly out of his mind with trouble, and she didn't know how long she'd have a house over her head, and wished she could only see the end of it; and, for her own part, she longed to get out of it all, and be at peace; and a great deal more to the same effect, slightly incoherent, and puncturing the wounds it was intended to heal. The truth was, that poor Mrs. Rawlings had latterly grown very garrulous; her thoughts had begun to ravel in an odd way; and she would

talk on ahead, if anybody would listen to her; and tears would sometimes start into her eyes, and stand there helplessly on the lids, as if they did not know why they were summoned. Many little symptoms were becoming perceptible, in her looks and her "bald talk," of that confusion and scattering of ideas which are preliminary, in people of feeble constitution, to a general break-up of the faculties. Everybody was indulgent to her, and suffered her to chatter without interruption. It was the only pleasure she had—that incessant 'drivel, so full of curious little good-natured cross-purposes, and wandering platitudes!

One evening Lord William desired to see Margaret in the drawing-room. He had hitherto spoken but little to her on the subjects that most occupied their thoughts; but now that she was more calm and composed, he felt it no longer necessary to observe any restraint.

"I wished to have a little quiet conversation with you, Margaret, if you think you are well enough to bear it."

"I was anxious for it myself, my lord," she replied; "I feel it would be a relief to me."

"You are aware of the result of the inquiry into that unfortunate business, and that I have been urged to sanction legal measures against Mr. Winston?"

"Yes—I have heard so."

"I refused to lend my name to such a proceeding. I mention this to put your mind at rest."

"It was very generous and noble—considering how you loved him!"

"My love for him, Margaret, did not extend to his errors. But we will not talk of that. I felt that if the family of Lord Charles Eton showed any vindictive feeling to Mr. Winston, they would have done you an additional wrong. He has not been heard of since, and I presume he is now beyond the reach of danger. If he be prudent, and keep out of England for a time, he may one day return with safety. After all, it was an act committed in the heat of passion; he did no more than others might have done—than others have done."

"It is for my sake, my lord, you are so lenient to him. But it was a great crime—and I sicken to think that he was guilty of it."

"Not for your sake alone," he exclaimed; then paused for a moment. "Margaret, I dare not call Mr. Winston to account. I owe it to myself to screen and save him."

"My lord!"

"Be patient and listen to me. I speak to you of things that have been shut up in my life, and made me the lonely man you have known me; and when I see in the circumstances which have befallen others a fatal recollection of my own early history revived before me, almost exactly as it happened to myself, you cannot be much surprised at my forbearance."

"Happened to you, Lord William? Did you, too, once love as he did—and——"

"If you will not think it an unpardonable folly," said Lord William, smiling, "in a man of my age and habits to carry about such a memory with him, and to preserve it as freshly as if it were an incident of yesterday, when he ought to be more sensibly employed—I may confess as much to you. Most men love in their youth. Why might not I? Men generally forget these things—they are swept away into the current of graver occupations. Age brings a different set of feelings—throws us in more upon ourselves—aches, and wants, and physical infirmities give us enough to do, without troubling ourselves with love—and so our enthusiasm goes and our elasticity, and we are glad enough to escape from our sentimental devotions, and look to our diet and our rheumatism. But circumstances will sometimes, in spite of us, recall these memories, and keep them alive. With me it has never slumbered—it was seared upon my heart, and its mark is there still."

"But what was it? How does Mr. Winston's case resemble yours?"

"I opposed your marriage with Lord Charles on the ground of inequality of birth; but it was not from mere pride of lineage—although I suffered him to think so. It touched me closer. In my youth, Margaret, I thought no man ever loved so madly—and I am half-ashamed to say that, through the long mist of years, I think so even now! She was not in my own rank of life—that heightened the romance on both sides, and we were prepared to sacrifice the world for each other. In this extremity I was compelled to confide my secret to a friend, in whose honour I would have reposed my life. He deceived me—he deceived her—falsified me to her—appealed to her pride—provoked her resentment—and succeeded in his treachery. She who was to have been my wife, ensnared by the basest artifices, became his mistress. For that most criminal of all perfidies he paid the penalty of his life."

Throughout this relation Lord William maintained a calm-

ness, speaking slowly, and almost in a whisper, which was more painful than the strongest outward emotion. Margaret crept to his side and trembled.

"You do not wonder now," said Lord William, recovering the firm tone of his voice, "why I have screened Mr. Winston?"

"And she?" inquired Margaret.

"I have never seen her since—I could not trust myself; but it has been the constant care of my life, of which she is happily ignorant, to watch over her security in another country."

"Then she still lives?"

"Come—you must not extract all my secrets. She is dead to me for ever."

While this conversation was passing, one who had a deep interest in it was watching the windows from the square below. The same figure had for several nights appeared in the same place; and this was the first time that lights were visible in the drawing-room. Night after night the house was dark, and he who watched for some token of the life within, was hitherto doomed to be disappointed. But now the object of his vigil was attained. From time to time he noted the shadows that fell upon the picture-frames of those who were moving inside, and he concluded from their frequency that there were at least two persons in the room. This discovery seemed to throw him into perplexity, and he watched and waited as if he were undecided what course to take. At length, after many turns, he crossed over to the house, and rapidly ascending the steps, knocked at the door. It was presently opened—he went in—and, after a short parley in the hall, the door closed again. Half an hour elapsed after the visitor had entered the house, when Clara appeared in the drawing-room, in a state of evident alarm and agitation. There was an open note in her hand.

"You must not be frightened," she whispered to Margaret, drawing her aside, "I have something to tell you—but you must promise to control yourself."

"You may trust me—I promise."

"Well—I have had a note from somebody."

"Somebody? Who?"

"Here it is—but you had better not read it now. I will tell you its contents."

"Yes——" said Margaret, taking the note, and looking at

the handwriting, which she recognised at once to be that of Henry Winston. A ghastly pallor passed in a shudder over her face.

"Mad—he is mad!" she cried; "I believed he had left the country. Lord William thought so."

"No—he has taken no measures for his safety,—and will not—till—that is what he has written about."

"Till—what does he say?"

"In the letter he entreated me to see him for that purpose, and hoping it might spare you from something worse, I——"

"Worse?—oh! worse, indeed!" said Margaret; "still in England—he is infatuated!—he writes to see you?"

"I have seen him."

"You have seen him? Where?"

"Here——"

"In this house?"

"Be calm, for Heaven's sake! Yes, in this house——"

"When?"

"You must keep your promise with me, and contro yourself. He brought the note himself."

"Himself!"

"Ah! Margaret, great as the sorrow is he has brought upon us, our sufferings are slight compared with his. He is dreadfully altered—I could not bear to look at him. Grief and repentance have broken him down; yet, much as I felt for him, I did not dare to give him any hope that you would grant the last request he will ever make to you in this world. I told him I would ask you."

"A request to me? Do not repeat it. Whatever it is, I will not hear it."

"I feared so—and told him so. But he would not receive the answer from me. He will take it only from yourself."

"When was this, Clara?"

"Now—this moment."

"To-night?"

"He is waiting in the next room."

"This is very cruel, Clara," she replied, glancing in alarm towards Lord William; "that he should come to this house under such circumstances—and Lord William here. He must go. To expect that I should see him—that we could ever meet again—it is too dreadful. Tell him to leave the house. I have no message to send. I will receive none from him. Why, why does he put me to this trial!"

"I will say only one word, Margaret; my heart tells me I owe it to him. Through me all this misery came upon him—for my sake, you will let me say it."

"For your sake—anything, Clara."

"He has come here to ask your forgiveness. The penitent is not repulsed who seeks pardon of Heaven—you will not show less mercy to Henry Winston!"

"Clara, you will break my heart."

"No—it will be balm to it hereafter, to feel that you did not send him away in despair, with this heavy weight upon his soul. It will be a comfort to you to know that you have not doomed him to a life abandoned of God and man. I implore you to grant this act of grace—for my sake, if not for his."

It was a severe struggle of feeling with Margaret. She shrank in terror from the thought of meeting Henry Winston, with that recent scene of death still fresh before her; but Clara's appeal was too affecting to be resisted. She knew the secret anguish that was in her mind, and how much she could alleviate it by making this last effort, and she relented.

"I will not see him alone. If it must be, Clara, it shall be here—in this room. *He* shall be the witness of our last interview."

This was not exactly what Clara had anticipated; but she felt that Margaret was right.

"You will be shocked to hear," said Margaret, while Clara was gone to prepare Henry Winston for the meeting, "that Mr. Winston desires to see me, and that, at my sister's request, I have consented to admit him."

"Mr. Winston!" exclaimed Lord William.

"He is here—in the house."

"This is rashness, indeed,—the height of folly and recklessness," exclaimed Lord William; "that he should court destruction in this way, after the forbearance we have shown him. Very wrong and wicked—you must not ask me to be present."

"I must entreat you not to leave the room. He can have nothing to say that you ought not to hear—and I shall need your support to sustain me through this final agony. I would gladly have avoided this—there is a grave between us, which his presence will re-open, but—that was his step! It struck upon my heart—do not leave me!"

She sank upon a sofa close to Lord William; and, as Henry Winston came into the room, she pressed her hands tightly

over her eyes, until he began to speak, and then, as if the sound of his voice had loosened every nerve, suddenly let them drop, and gazed at him like a person who was spell-bound. He looked wan and haggard, and spoke in a thick, choking tone.

"I thank you for this mercy. My utter wretchedness has brought me here. I wanted to say to you what I hoped would be acceptable, if it would not give you pain to hear me speak—if you could bear to see me after what has happened. May I speak?" and he looked into the faces of the group, one by one, but they were all silent. Clara had gone round to Margaret, and was leaning over her, clasping her hands.

"I had great and heavy provocation—but I did not come to say that—I did not mean to say it. No provocation can palliate my guilt to you—I have no justification to plead to you. That was what I had to say. I was told that it would be dangerous to come here, and warned that, if I valued my life, I should seek safety in flight."

"If you are prudent," said Lord William, slightly turning his head towards him, "it may not be too late yet."

"I understand you, my lord—I feel your kindness—doubly kind from *you*—and thank you for it. But of what value is life to me? I cannot go forth with *her* terrible silence on my heart. I came to ask one word of grace, to save me from myself, and enable me to bear the burden that is weighing me down. You will speak it—Margaret!"

His voice sank as he uttered her name, and he grasped a chair to support himself. Margaret buried her face in her hands, and a slight sob escaped her.

"I implore your forgiveness by the memory of what has been between us," he continued,—"the blighted hopes that have destroyed me. You will not send me from you in despair of mercy here and hereafter? That is all—I will try to live, if I may carry with me one blessed word of pardon. I had many things to say—you can comprehend them. You know what is in my thoughts—what I might have been—and what I am."

He paused—Margaret was still silent.

"Think of the time when life was innocent and full of hope for both of us; and if I am now criminal in your eyes, think of what it was that made me so. It is dreadful to meet you thus—but it will be an ease to you when I am gone to feel that you have given me a motive to drag out my life, that I

may seek to make my peace with Heaven. Had you been happy, I could have borne my own wretchedness, but the knowledge that you were suffering too, was beyond my strength to bear. I struggled with it, but it mastered me. I ought to have fled from you—I had no right to linger near you, to think, to feel—I should have held your griefs sacred, and spared you this cruel trial; but my reason forsook me, and in a moment of frenzy I forgot what was due to you, and thought only of the love that was desolated for ever, and the wrongs that smote upon my brain. No penitence can atone for that—but if remorse and sorrow and the life-long agony of a broken heart may look up to you for grace—Margaret! you will not send me hence in despair. Let me hear your voice—one word, Margaret!”

During this appeal Margaret made many efforts to look at Henry Winston, as if she wished to speak, but lacked the power, and towards the conclusion, he had approached nearer to her, and at the end had fallen upon his knees beside the sofa. Lord William, who could not conceal the agitation he felt throughout, had drawn closer to Margaret; and Clara, with imploring looks, was encouraging and urging her to speak. Margaret slowly raised her head, and looked from the one to the other, and then her eyes rested upon Henry Winston.

“What can I say? Pardon is in the hands of God!” she said, in a voice almost inaudible from strong emotion.

“Say, Margaret, that you accept my penitence, and in this world I will trouble you no more,” he exclaimed.

“I do—I do—” she replied; “I grieve for you from my soul, and will pray to Heaven to send you peace and resignation. Remember, there are others who have claims upon you. For their sakes be careful of your life, and strive to look with hope to the future. I would not make your burden harder to bear—and it lightens mine to tell you this. Do not despair of mercy!”

The tone of affliction in which she spoke imparted a touching solemnity to these few words, that made them fall like a knell upon his ears. He felt that the hour of separation was come; and that suffer what he might, he owed it to her to bear up in her presence with what strength he could to the last.

“I thank God I have heard your voice again! It will linger in my heart to my dying hour. I will obey you;—although it is little to live for others, it will be all to me that

you have desired it. May Heaven protect and guard you—Margaret!”

He rose and hesitated— then went slowly towards the door, and turned again. Their eyes met for a moment— it was over.

POSTSCRIPT

AND now nothing remains but to gather up the ends of our threads, and clip them off—for our work is done.

Richard Rawlings possessed that power of shaping and controlling circumstances which is inherent in a strong will and inexorable resolution; and, earnestly devoting his business talents to the practical objects he had marked out, he ultimately retrieved, not the position he had lost, but one which was more sequestered and secure. His mind was too energetic to lie idle, even if necessity had not called it into action. But he never became rich again. There were no golden miracles to be wrought through the pursuits in which he embarked; nor did his desires point in that direction. He had to begin an industrial career, in which everything depended on quiet perseverance, and in which the reputation of having a genius for creating wealth out of bubbles would have damaged rather than served him. He was glad enough to part with that dangerous *prestige*, and to address himself to small gains, procured by steady and patient efforts. Thus his life was divided into two striking phases, the latter of which, less brilliant, and lying as it were in the shadow of his abdicated grandeur, was by far the more satisfactory. And by the time the great world had forgotten him, he had succeeded in discovering another world, a little lower down, which he grew on such good terms with as induced him to modify very materially his opinions of mankind.

To Mrs. Rawlings the change was a little uncomfortable at first. But she was of so plastic and accommodating a nature, that she soon reconciled herself to her new way of life, and insensibly subsided into great caps and arm-chairs by the fire-side, maundering over the past as if it had been a dream which she was trying to unravel.

Within the ensuing year Clara and Mr. Farquhar were married—but not in the neighbourhood of Hanover-square. The family experiences were unfavourable to galantie-shows on such

occasions. The ceremony was performed in the parish church of Hornsey, away from the din and uproar of the busy town. The bride was profoundly happy. Yet, strange to say, she wept the whole time. There were few tears, however, in Clara's after life. Her true heart filled her home with light and joy.

There is a quiet parsonage-house in one of the romantic dells of Devonshire—one of those small dells where you are enclosed in a forest of myrtles and roses, and where you feel very much as if you were living in a flower-stand amongst geraniums; and in that parsonage-house lives Mrs. Pearce Upton. She is considerably changed since we used to meet her in the Wren's Nest; and at the first glance you would scarcely recognise the merry Rose Winston in that staid, but sweet face, which looks out so calmly from under a cottage bonnet, meekly ornamented with a sad-coloured ribbon. Young clergymen's wives who have the care of parishes upon their benevolent little hands, as well as unceasing claims to occupy them at home, to say nothing of lawns and flower-beds which they are expected to keep as trim and orderly as the rest of their duties, may be allowed to acquire an air of missionary serenity, without necessarily losing their original sunshine. Notwithstanding the repose of her manner, and the stillness of the smile which sits so patiently in her eyes, Rose Winston, if occasion called it out, could be as merry as ever. But then she has responsibilities in her position here which subdue her natural spirits—an example to set to others; a difficult card to play, on a limited stipend, with the proud county people; and two tiny Uptons, that engross all the leisure she can give to them; so that, after all, she has but scanty opportunities and few temptations to enjoy herself in the old light-hearted way.

Henry Winston having gone abroad after his last interview with Margaret, and matters being cleared up between her and Rose, their old friendship was renewed, and kept up from time to time by an affectionate correspondence. Rose was, above all things, anxious to induce Margaret to pay her a visit in Devonshire. She was sure that change of scene would be beneficial to her, and she exhausted her descriptive powers in the charming pictures she drew of the neighbourhood, and the parsonage, and the children—one of whom was called after her, and was asking about her every day, although its organ of speech was as yet so obscure that nobody else could under-

stand what it said. Margaret resisted these solicitations as long as she could. She dreaded the meeting with Rose, and the revival of old subjects, which were equally painful to them both. But Rose was not to be denied, and urged her petition so perseveringly, that Margaret at last consented.

In an intercourse, renewed under such circumstances, it is impossible to avoid that tendency to autobiographical disclosures which no sense of mutual distress can restrain confidential friends from indulging in. And, accordingly, although there was, at first, some timidity and embarrassment in approaching certain topics that lay in the recesses of their hearts, Rose and Margaret gradually overcame their reluctance to speak freely what they felt and thought, until at length, instead of being, as they apprehended, a source of anguish, it became a relief and a pleasure to them. The retirement of Devonshire tranquillized the bruised spirit, and Margaret began to take a new interest in life, reflected from the domestic peace of Rose and her little household. Month after month passed over, and, with the exception of an occasional visit to town, she still remained there. She felt herself happier there than anywhere else. Rose had letters frequently from her brother, and sometimes communicated a part of their contents to Margaret; but the last letter she received—which was, indeed, only a few weeks ago—she kept to herself; for it announced the unexpected intelligence that Henry Winston was coming home.

A few hundred yards from the Yarlton station stands a fantastical modern house on an open patch of ground, laid out in a raw, cheerful way, with a profusion of tall mallows and other gaudy flowers, such as we see in jaunty enclosures on the sloping margins of our iron highways. It is just such a house as contractors run up, and hang with starry papers, for the residence of the station-master of a railroad. In this house reside Mr. Peabody and his wife. He looks like a well-fed man, with a lazy, shining face; while Mrs. Peabody is as thin as ever, with a carked visage and a constitutional cough. One might suppose that, being so well to do in the world, she had become a little mellowed by prosperity, and had by this time left off niggling and objecting, but John Peabody says it is her nature, and he ought to know. But he is tolerably indifferent to these things now; and as his occupation enables him to keep out of the way of the raven that sits croaking at home, he contrives to be as happy as a man who pants for a

Castle of Indolence, and can't get it, has any reasonable right to be.

Of Mr. Pogey we are unable to give any information that can be safely relied upon. It was said that he went out with a batch of emigrants to New Zealand, where, he understood, they were greatly in want of medical men. But we hope the report was unfounded; for, at his time of life, after having been so shattered by reverses, such an experiment would be rather hazardous.

Mr. Costigan disappeared after the duel, and is supposed to be living upon his estate in Ireland, the securest retreat he could take refuge in, considering the difficulty that has been hitherto experienced in finding out where it is.

Captain Scott Dingle, a sadder man, although, perhaps, not much the wiser from his experiences, haunts the streets towards nightfall, when he comes out to dinner, and usually devotes his evenings to a select circle of retired gentlemen, who have formed themselves into a sort of voluntary club at a small tavern in a narrow passage off the Strand. Here he meets a few congenial spirits, who, like himself, live in the past; and who sustain in each other, while their brief orgie lasts, that airy and pleasant spirit of enjoyment which, like all social fallacies, droops into misanthropy when they separate for their lonely chambers.

Mr. Sloake has been promised an appointment for Eugene in the office of a Joint-Stock Company which has not yet been formed, and he is manfully subsisting upon the situation in advance.

And now, reader, we close our story. You have not found it very merry at the end, but remember that it is simply a picture of life as it is, and that life is chequered with rather more shadow than sunshine. And if it do not make us merrier, its purpose will be answered if it make us ever so little the wiser. Should you have discovered a few small truths scattered through it here and there, we shall be content; and if their quality be not always the most agreeable, we would remind you that truths, like other tonics, are not the less strengthening in their effects because they are sometimes rather bitter to the palate.

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